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HOME,
OR
THE IRON RULE.

A DOMESTIC STORY.

BY SARAH STICKNEY,

AUTHOR OF

“ THE POETRY OF LIFE ;” “ PICTURES OF PRIVATE LIFE,” &c.

“ There is a great deal of difference between a good man and a good father: I have known bad men who excelled my father as much in parental care, as he was superior to them in real virtue.”

LORD LYTTLETON.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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CHAPTER I.

WHATEVER were the feelings of tenderness, compunction, or regret, which visited the mind of Stephen Grey on the death of his son Allan, they were inclosed within a sanctuary whose secrets were exposed to no human eye.

Mary, always disposed to think kindly of her father, believed that he suffered deeply. Nor was it any proof of his indifference to the natural bond of parental affection thus violently torn asunder, or of his forgetfulness of the many trying occasions when he had felt

himself called upon, by a mistaken sense of duty, to act with vindictive harshness towards his son, that he was now never heard to mention his name; and if, in the common course of conversation, or in the transaction of ordinary affairs, any memorial of Allan's brief and melancholy existence was forced upon his notice, he seemed to shrink from the evidence of his senses, as if a blight had fallen on one page of his memory—a page upon whose dark passages he would willingly have closed his eyes for ever.

To Mary Grey, a kind of mournful satisfaction was afforded, by the idea that her father had become sensible, even when it was too late, of the natural claims of his ill-fated son; and whether from the compunctious visitings of sad thoughts on this most distressing subject, or from the fact of her own gentle manners, and quiet unobtrusive companionship tending rather to soothe than to irritate his harsh unbending temper, certain it was, that

Stephen Grey became much less difficult to live with, in a moderate degree of comfort; though the sadness and loneliness of his fire-side, shared exclusively by him and his daughter, was beyond what a spirit less resigned than Mary's would have found it possible to endure with fortitude.

The only circumstance tending in any way to vary the monotony of her present existence, was an occasional letter from her sister Harriet, who sent her lively, and sometimes satirical descriptions, first, of the splendour and gaiety with which her appearance as a bride had been celebrated; and then, of the bustle and stir of a county election, and the gratifying importance derived from Mr. Maxwell's opposing his powerful interest to that of the late member, Sir Henry Belgrave.

As if forgetful, not only of her own gloomy apprehensions on the subject of her marriage, but of the melancholy event which had so soon after converted her recent home into a house

of mourning, Harriet seemed to be giving up her whole soul to the interest of Lord Dacre, the present candidate for public favour; and Mary read long animated descriptions of dinners, and balls, and evening parties, with utter astonishment how any human being could be so regardless of the sad realities of life; and, consequently, with a lower estimate than ever of her sister's stability of character.

“ Poor Allan!” said Mary. “ But a few weeks ago, you were filling your place in our domestic circle, and already this heartless girl is laughing her life away, as if she had never known a single grief.”

Mary had scarcely patience to proceed, especially when the next sentence in her sister's letter began, “ Only think how delightful! Our house is thronged with company of all sorts from morning till night—the bell is never at rest. We have a collation spread forth at the service of all who hunger and thirst, from twelve till five; and, in the mean

time, I go about canvassing, kissing all the little dirty boys and girls, distributing patterns of my last pelerine to the wives and daughters of the burgesses, praising the grocer's strong cheeses, ordering webs of Irish from the linendraper's, and, in short, soliciting their 'sweet voices' by eloquence, directed through so many different channels, that Frank Nugent tells me I have made more converts than his mother; though her ladyship actually supported Lord Dacre in person, the last time he came down; and, amazing condescension! honoured me with a call, and begged me to accompany her in visiting some of her 'old friends,' as she was pleased to call them."

"It was mortifying to see her languor and indifference as she went through a business, which, with her name and countenance, accompanied by a few of her fascinating smiles, might have been transacted with tenfold effect. I learned afterwards that she had only been dragged into it by the persuasion of her son, whose generous heart is not satisfied so long

as any effort by which he can serve his friend remains untried. Indeed, Mary, I cannot forgive her. To gratify the noble wishes of such a son, she ought to have been more in earnest. Besides, there is something in this celebrated woman that makes one shrink into nothing beside her; and nobody likes that, let the reducing agent be whom it may. Had you been in my place, how charmingly you would have reflected the lustre of her ladyship's mind; but you know I never could *reflect*, either one way or another. Hanging your head, and casting your dark melancholy eyes about, like one inspired, *you* might have asked, in a sweetly modulated voice, whether Lord Byron's Thyrza was indeed a white bear, as report was pleased to say; but, for my part, I am quite an inferior sort of being, and cannot approach within the influence of this great genius, without feeling my own feeble light too much obscured. Indeed, I made altogether such a sorry figure, that had not Frank Nugent been much more like one of my class, than his mo-

ther's, he would have been quite ashamed of me.

“ I am scribbling in the greatest haste. My horses are at the door, and Frank declares he will not wait another moment ; but I must tell you something more about this great woman, as her sweetness and her sentimentality are quite in your way.

“ You know that report speaks of Elliott Lee being always in her train, or her in his—you may settle the point of precedence as you please. I am, however, confident that I saw him in her carriage as they drove out of town. At least I saw her addressing herself in earnest conversation, and with looks more bland than she had worn the whole of the preceding day, to a gentleman exactly answering to a description of him which you once showed me in a letter—”

Harriet did not say from whom, for we have a natural repugnance to mention the names of those, to whose memory conscience upbraids us with having been unfaithful.

This trifling instance was the only proof of

any kind of depth or delicacy of feeling betrayed throughout the whole of the letter, the general character of which was so repulsive to Mary's mind, that she committed it to the flames as soon as read—wishing, most earnestly, that she could as easily efface all recollection of it from her thoughts. Indeed, so entirely incapable was she of entering into the situation of a woman who could write in this manner so soon after her own marriage, and what was still more remarkable, so soon after her brother's death, that she began to think something of her father's blindness to the natural distinctions of character must hitherto have obscured her mental vision.

Again she pondered upon the fact of Harriet's not having once mentioned the name of her husband, even in the most casual manner; and her having spoken of her domestic comforts as enhanced by a constant succession of visitors, whose want of selection must render their society any thing but interesting and instructive. But before these thoughts, and much more

oppressive in its weight upon her spirits, though she was wholly at a loss to account for its distressing influence, came that of the frequent mention of Frank Nugent, a young man of gay and worthless character, whose neglected morals cast a shade over his mother's celebrity, which her brilliant talents were unable to dispel.

“What is Frank Nugent to Harriet?” said Mary to herself a thousand times, without being able to soothe her anxiety by any rational or satisfactory answer. Nor was there a friend to whom she could apply for advice or consolation, the delicacy of the case being such as to render it of the greatest importance that her frequently-recurring suspicions should be confined within her own bosom.

Under apprehensions of a more communicable nature, she might possibly have appealed to Terence Malone. For, since the return of Catherine Lee to her own home, and the settlement of the two stripped families at

Welbourne House and the Abbey, within their own contracted circles of interest, Terence had again become to her the confidential friend, whose intimacy she met with chastened feelings; secure in his devoted attachment to his wife, and in the strict scrutiny she exercised over her own heart, that such intimacy might be maintained with perfect safety to both. And, had Ellen been all to her doting husband which his fond anticipations once pictured her, he would probably never have felt so much the need of Mary's friendship; for he was formed to love, singly and devotedly, where he could concentrate the whole force of his affections. But Ellen soon displayed, even to his partial eye, her natural desire to gratify her own immediate wishes at any cost, or any sacrifice to another.

Knowing as she did the state of her husband's circumstances, a sincere and disinterested affection for him would have enabled her to wait patiently for the time when he

might afford her all the indulgences she valued, and which he had the warmest wish to grant ; but such was her dissatisfaction at the dilapidated state of the Abbey, that she declared, in the most unequivocal terms, her inability to reside within its walls, until a thorough repair of the whole building had been effected.

In vain did Mary endeavour to persuade her that one apartment, neatly fitted up in a modern style, would be all-sufficient for the present, especially for an inmate who had been accustomed to few of the luxuries of life. In vain did Terence substitute elegance for neatness, and promise that one room—a drawing room, if she liked to give it that name, should be furnished under her direction with every thing to gratify her taste. She was neither satisfied, nor had the grace to appear so ; but left the matter in their hands, coldly remarking, that if she must do with one room—she must.

There is perhaps no logic—not even that of the schools—which jars more upon the ear of a husband than this ; and Terence, distressed beyond measure to see a cloud upon so beautiful a brow, to hear the murmur of complaint from lips so lovely, and to find that he could not pour such floods of happiness upon the being he loved best, as he had expected to flow simply from the acknowledged wish to please—knowing, too, no other means of producing unlimited enjoyment, but by unlimited indulgence, granted to each succeeding request more than prudence warranted ; and far more than he could afford, without the greatest difficulty and inconvenience to himself.

“ You will spoil your wife,” said Mary to him one day as they walked alone ; “ you must not indulge all her fancies, or they will have no end.”

“ Poor girl !” replied Terence, “ she has willingly shared my miserable home. I should

be a barbarian not to make it as habitable as I can."

"There is, beyond mere prudence," observed Mary, "another lesson most important to be learned. If Ellen will not of her own accord remember that you have feelings to be consulted as well as herself, you should teach her this truth, by asserting your right to refuse, where consent is either unwise, or particularly inconvenient."

Terence looked extremely grave. Indeed he often looked so now; and seemed like one who studies a melancholy picture, at first but faintly revealed, yet growing clearer and clearer beneath his steady gaze. At last he said, "Mary, it is not in my nature to teach what is due to myself. If Ellen does not consult my feelings from affection, she shall never do it from duty; and if she does not love me so well as I love her, it is a sad truth, but I cannot help it."

The system upon which Terence Malone had

been educated, was one of indiscriminate indulgence; and he determined that she who had trusted her happiness to his keeping, should never have to reproach him with thwarting her wishes, or disappointing her hopes. Had Ellen possessed the generous feelings of her sister Mary, she would have made an ample return for this indulgence, by wishing only for what was reasonable, and choosing only what was for the benefit of her husband; but with her the circle of desire seemed to widen with every gratification. It is scarcely necessary to ask, if, when coldly expressing her disappointment, after nothing but the impracticable nature of her request had prevented its entire fulfilment—when receiving without gratitude the extreme of compliance which Terence found it in his power to grant—she still looked lovely in her husband's eyes. It is more than probable she did not. But still, what admiration failed to produce, pity could instantaneously wring from him;

and Ellen had only to shed one pearly tear, when he was again her willing slave, ready to compass every earthly means to spare her a single heart-ache.

Mary saw that this state of things was not calculated to last, and still less likely to terminate in peace ; but married people are dangerous to warn, and difficult to advise, and she had other sources of anxiety to occupy her more immediate care.

Not long after receiving from her sister Harriet the letter we have already partially transcribed, Mary was startled on opening one, written in a strange hand, and without a signature ; though evidently from some individual acquainted with the circumstances and connexions of her family.

There is something very destructive to equanimity of mind in the receipt of an anonymous letter ; nor was Mary less agitated, after reading for the second time, the following communication :

“MADAM,

“Nothing could be more repulsive to my feelings than this covert mode of addressing you; yet, as I write without any personal interest in what I am about to say, and as there are considerations which render it more prudent to withhold a name possessing neither worth nor importance in your estimation, I trust the rectitude of my motive, and the urgency of my request, may supply the want of farther ceremony.

“You have a sister lately married in the town of ——. The world considers her too charming for the situation in which she has placed herself. This would be of little consequence, did not the artless vivacity of her manners give a sanction to private freedom, and public scandal. As you value your sister, I therefore entreat you to fly to her, and warn her, if not already too late, of the dangers that surround an inexperienced, lively, and fascinating woman, uncongenially married. Warn her that

no young man can offer her an advantageous friendship under such circumstances—no gay man under any; but especially warn her of the danger of cultivating an intimacy with one individual whom you will soon learn to distinguish from the rest of her admirers.

“I will not conclude by soliciting your pardon for the impertinent intrusion of this letter; because, whatever you may think of it now, time will convince you that it was prompted by the urgency of the case, and not by any want of delicacy or respect for your sister, whose heart I believe to be as free from evil, as her conduct is from the affectation of prudence and reserve.”

Mary's first impulse was to cast this letter from her, as an artful and malicious imputation upon her sister's character; yet the more she reflected upon the probable motive of the writer, the stronger was her conviction that it had, to use the words of its anonymous author, arisen solely out of a desire to aid and protect

one who stood but too much in need of the assistance of a watchful and judicious friend. Still Mary was so deeply shocked at the contents of the letter, as to feel more than half offended. Yet why quarrel with the writer, she asked of herself as often as she looked upon the portentous page, when no appeal was made except to her sisterly feelings, and no request but for her presence, where she more than suspected it had for some time been needed?

After looking at the subject in every light, it became at last her fixed determination to fly to her sister, and save her if possible from public shame—if not from private folly. How to obtain her father's consent to such a sudden and important movement, was a point of great difficulty; and the dread of being asked whether Harriet had sent any express invitation, or whether there was any particular cause for her going just now, almost paralyzed her powers of utterance whenever she attempted to lay her wish before her father.

At last, however, the difficulty was overcome, and that reluctant murmuring consent extorted from Stephen Grey, which consisted of little more than a promise to take the matter into consideration ; after which act of condescension, the petitioner was generally compelled to wait a prodigious length of time, prolonged, according to his pleasure, on every unsuccessful application to know whether his mighty mind was yet made up, or whether the parties might be allowed to proceed to action. Mary knew better than to make any such appeal ; and she had the misery of waiting day after day, and of seeing her father on each succeeding morning depart, without one word being uttered in reference to the subject that lay with such uneasy weight upon her heart.

At last Stephen Grey informed his daughter that he knew of nothing very particular to prevent her paying a visit to her sister, provided her stay was not long ; unless it were the

dangerous exposure of her travelling alone ; and Mary, who had every thing prepared for setting off at a moment's warning, actually ventured to propose that she should leave home on the following morning.

Stephen Grey was perfectly startled. He was in the habit of considering hasty movements as too frequently premature, and ill-advised ; and there was, besides, an anxious fluttered look in Mary's face when she spoke to him, indicating an unwarrantable degree of excitement, and haste to be gone. He therefore determined that her anxiety should have time to cool ; and fixing upon the following week for the commencement of her journey, left her to spend the intermediate time in the best way she could.

Accustomed as Mary was to this kind of treatment, she found it particularly difficult to bear with patience on the present occasion ; and long were the successive days in rolling over, for each brought with it an accumulated

load of fearful apprehensions, and oppressive cares.

When the eagerly anticipated morning came at last, though an arduous and painful duty lay before her, she felt like one escaping from protracted and irksome bondage, and for awhile this feeling sustained her spirits; but a long day's journey alone, in wintry and tempestuous weather has a powerful effect in subduing all mental animation, and by the time the coach with its weary passengers had reached the temporary resting-place, from whence a packet-boat was to convey all who dared trust themselves in such a night across a river whose boisterous waves sounded hoarse and frightful in the darkness, there could not well have been a more desolate feeling than that with which Mary took her place beside a blazing fire, around which all the passengers had gathered for an hour of transient comfort, before the tide should serve to convey them to the opposite shore.

The apartment in which Mary found herself mingled with society by no means select, was one of considerable length, containing two fires, the farthest of which had already been taken possession of by three gentlemen, who seemed to bid defiance alike to the storm without, and the intrusion of strange company within. They were engaged in conversation, and Mary passed them apparently unnoticed, as she moved onward with a silent dignity which defended her from all officious or impertinent attentions. Her situation was altogether one of peculiar trial to the nerves of a delicately constituted female. Alone and unprotected at the close of a dark and stormy day, with a broad river to cross, and a whole night of travelling still before her—at a strange inn, in strange company, and wholly unaccustomed to indiscriminate association with her fellow creatures; yet such was the absorbing interest arising from the peculiar occasion of her journey, and such her habit of forgetting her-

self whenever the happiness of those she loved was endangered, that she accepted without embarrassment the warmest seat beside the fire, politely offered her by the other travellers ; and instead of musing more than was actually necessary upon the difficulties and discomforts of her own situation, gave her whole soul up to kind thoughts and anxious solicitude for her sister.

Harriet, who, until the last few weeks, had kept up a regular and circumstantial detail of her own domestic proceedings, as well as of the public affairs belonging to the town in which her husband held so conspicuous a place, had now been silent for an unusual and alarming length of time ; and, as Mary reflected upon the probable cause of her silence, she felt as if any farther delay, even that of a single hour, which kept her from the scene of her distressing apprehensions, would be intolerable.

Looking round with impatience to learn whether a traveller who then entered had any

tidings to announce of their farther progress, she was struck with the earnest gaze of one of the three gentlemen, who, leaning his head upon his hand, sat with his eyes fixed, perhaps unconsciously, upon her face.

“Come,” said one of his companions, a fine, animated young man, of fewer years, and apparently of fewer pretensions of an intellectual nature—(and here Mary lost the name of the person addressed, for she was not particularly interested in it then,) “what are you dreaming about? You have been absent from the company for at least ten minutes, and the penalty shall be to tell your thoughts.”

“I was thinking”—said the older gentleman in a grave and musing tone; and he paused to tantalize his listeners with the promise of some deeply interesting thought—“I was thinking of a tree that grows in my mother’s garden.”

A loud laugh followed.

“You mean the apple tree in the garden of mother Eve, I presume,” replied his friend.

“Yes,” said the gentleman, whose thoughts

had thus been brought to light, “and of the serpent who was not satisfied with his own hell, but sought to pave the way for innocence to enter, and share it with him.”

Mary involuntarily looked round. The stranger had risen as he said this. A scowl was on his haughty brow, and the younger man for a moment seemed to quail before him; but again the stranger fixed upon her face such deep and earnest eyes, that she felt as if a sort of spell was upon her, forcing her every moment to do what she most wished to avoid—to look up, and meet his mysterious, but determined gaze. Nor was her embarrassment relieved, until the captain of the packet announced that all was ready, at the same time informing the company, that though it was a tremendously rough night, they would be obliged, in consequence of the state of the tide, to trust themselves to a small boat, in order to accomplish a landing on the opposite shore.

“Then I wait till morning,” was echoed by two or three individuals, who drew nearer to the fire, and seemed to congratulate themselves and each other upon the independence which enabled them to make their choice.

Mary hesitated for a moment, but seeing an old man, who, with his daughter, had been outside passengers through the whole day, quietly taking up his thread-bare cloak and cotton umbrella, while he shared with the pale shivering girl the cordial draught to which they both looked unaccustomed, she determined to follow; for whatever might be the influencing motive with these people, she felt that duty ought to be equally imperative with her.

No one whose mind was capable of sympathy could have watched her interesting countenance, and her gentle but agitated manner, as she prepared for her dismal and adventurous journey, without feelings of tenderness and compassion. Even the prudent men who

had drawn their chairs so closely to the fire, looked round, and warned her that the night was dark as pitch.

“It is indeed,” said the gentleman whose eyes had been fixed upon her; and then, advancing to assist her, he held her cloak for one moment of indecision, before he folded it around her slender form.

“I dare say it is,” replied Mary, “but I am not particularly timid.” And as she said this, her hands trembled so violently, that the stranger was compelled, in common kindness, to fasten the clasp of her cloak. Nor, though appearances seemed to give the lie to her words, was it a direct falsehood that Mary uttered; for, while the winds and waves had fewer terrors to her than to most women, she felt most sensibly her own lonely and unprotected situation, subjecting her as chance might direct, to the kindness, or the unkindness of strangers. Nor had the look and the

voice of him who would more willingly have soothed her fears, been without their influence in producing a temporary embarrassment, which so predominated over all personal apprehensions, as to divert her thoughts from real danger.

No sooner was a second summons heard from the water, than the stranger quietly drawing Mary's arm within his own, led her cautiously along her perilous way, protecting her alike from the violence of the storm, and from the rude but well-meant familiarity of the sailors, who stretched out their hands on every side to save the lady.

"I shall not go below," said Mary, placing herself at the side of the vessel. "I shall be perfectly safe here. Hark!" she exclaimed to her companion, "they are pushing off. Good night, sir. You have done me the greatest service."

But the stranger moved not from her side,

though he had brought with him no preparation for such a blast as they were about to encounter.

“ I thought you were not intending to cross to-night,” said Mary.

“ It is true,” he replied, “ I am travelling in an opposite direction, but I shall return with the next tide, and thus be able to join my friends in the morning.”

Mary now saw the extent of his kindness, and feeling that something was due on her part, insisted upon going below, where he would be more protected from the weather. But she had to contend with one too long accustomed to the indulgence of his own will, to be moved by the arguments of a woman ; and he stood beside her with a sort of quiet obstinacy, neither answering her entreaties with the usual protestations of gallantry, nor shrinking, as some men would have done, beneath the violence of the storm, in order that she might form a higher estimate of what

he was enduring for her sake. Indeed the only impression conveyed by his manner, was that of a cool indifference to present things, than which nothing is more calculated (at least when accompanied by refined and interesting manners) to lead a woman out of her wonted reserve; because, where no flattery and no professions are offered—in short, where no personal allusion is made to herself, she feels like an independent agent, at liberty to act from the impulse of her own heart; and often on such occasions acts both kindly and nobly.

Mary would have left the man who *professed* to be thinking solely for her, to feel the necessity of thinking for himself; but she could not leave the silent stranger who stood so faithfully sheltering her from the storm, nor rest satisfied until she had asked one of the sailors to supply the gentleman with a cloak.

The wind, though extremely boisterous, being

favourable for their passage, they soon reached the shoal water, where the difficulty of getting on board a small boat awaited them. Here Mary again saw, by torchlight, that the old man and his daughter stood foremost, as if determined to submit to no delay ; and though her companion, watching the many fruitless attempts of the sailors to secure the boat to the side of the vessel, entreated her yet to return with the packet, and wait until morning, she simply answered that she had an urgent reason for hastening on her way ; and that if these poor people were willing to risk themselves, she might surely do the same ; “ but you—” she added, “ there can be no reason why you should venture.”

“ Can you not believe,” replied the stranger, “ that, like yourself, I am influenced by the force of example ? If you risk a life so precious to your fellow creatures, I have no excuse.”

At this moment, a cry from the sailors announced that all was ready ; and the stranger,

seizing Mary in his arms, was the first to spring into the boat. The old man and his daughter clung trembling to the ropes, afraid to trust themselves to the tottering plank, which looked every moment as if it would be wrenched from its fastenings.

“ Look, look !” exclaimed Mary, “ they will be left behind after all.”

Her companion rushed forward, and already the girl was in his arms; while her father in the mean time had advanced, and after slowly feeling his way along the plank, had just grasped the hand of a sailor, when suddenly a rolling wave separated the boat from the side of the vessel, and Mary saw nothing but the flash of the torches extending over the foaming water.

Fortunately the stranger who had so generously risked his life in the service of a poor unknown girl, was an excellent swimmer, and they both rose in safety, before the father had become fully sensible of what had occurred.

A few moments more brought the whole party to the shore ; and Mary heard, with a transient feeling of disappointment, that a coach was already waiting to receive such passengers as had ventured to cross the water.

The poor girl in her dripping garments was naturally the first care of all ; but when it was ascertained that her journey terminated at the small town by the water side, the stranger again devoted his attentions exclusively to Mary, as if his own situation deserved not a moment's consideration.

“ This is an unlucky accident,” said he, as he conducted her from the boat ; “ I had one word of importance to say to you before we parted, and this cold bath seems to have washed away my thoughts.”

“ I had a thousand thanks to offer you,” said Mary, with all the warmth of her heart, “ had not the horror of that moment made me forget all I ought to remember ; but why did you come ?”

she added with emotion—"you will perish with the cold of this tremendous night, and—"

"And no one will have cause to weep if I do," he answered; and Mary saw by the light of the lamps that his fine countenance wore a bitter and melancholy smile. "But," he continued, "we have no time to lose." And still holding her hand, after she was seated in the carriage, "Remember," he added, "not one word of the anonymous letter—not one word to any mortal creature, unless you wish for a duel!—remember also the name of Frank Nugent!"

These words uttered in a low but emphatic whisper, were followed by the lash of the coachman's whip; and Mary, who was alone, had the whole night before her for uninterrupted reflections upon what she had seen and heard.

It is needless to say that under such circumstances sleep came not to close her weary

eyes, or to lull to rest the many vague ideas flitting across her mind, like the creations of delirium. She was now convinced that she had seen the author of the mysterious letter, and that she was known to him personally, as well as by her family and name ; that he was a gentleman, too, and one whose countenance and manners bespoke an elevated tone of character and thought. Perhaps he was one of Lady Nugent's circle, and thus might have been let into the confidence of her son. Perhaps—no, that could not be—it was impossible that Elliott Lee, the wild, free, energetic boy, who used to wear the impress of an ardent soul upon his very countenance, should grow up a cold, indifferent, haughty man, like the stranger from whom she had just parted.

Here Mary chid herself for having mentally bestowed such epithets upon one whose generous conduct was so entirely at variance with his proud looks and apathetic manner ; and

with such conflicting thoughts, all merging in a mystery which defied her utmost penetration, she wore away the tedious night, without arriving at any probable or satisfactory conclusion.

CHAPTER II.

ALTHOUGH Mary Grey had, subsequently to her sister's marriage, received many pressing invitations to spend the winter with her, no sooner had Harriet plunged into the real interest of the election, than these invitations became less warm, until at last they had ceased altogether; and Mary had been under the painful necessity of writing to announce her own approach, without the slightest reason to suppose she would be met with satisfaction.

It was, therefore, with many gloomy anticipations crowding upon her, that she found herself before her sister's door, just at the close of a winter's day, after a long journey,

when a cordial and hospitable welcome is most needed.

Harriet had only been so far apprized of her intentions, as to expect her sister about this time. The precise day had not been named, because Stephen Grey had not condescended to mark it with his final decision until the evening before, when it was too late to make it the subject of a letter; and now, when the large and polished door of Mr. Maxwell's hall had been opened, and the weary traveller had been duly announced, the lady of the mansion came rustling down stairs in her shining silks, declaring she was delighted to see her sister; though if ever face bore witness against the language of the tongue, hers did at that moment.

Glad would Mary Grey have been just then, to have sat down to an old-fashioned early tea, in some little quiet parlour by herself, or with her sister alone. But no; the first bell had already rung for dinner, and there was but

half an hour for dressing, as Mr. Maxwell declared it to be one of the first principles of his life, to wait dinner for no man—not even for the king.

Mary, sick and dizzy with the motion of the coach, could scarcely tell what objects were before her eyes; and when Mrs. Hilary rushed with open arms into her room, and Harriet and her officious woman dragged her from drawer to wardrobe, pointing out space sufficient for twice the sum of all her worldly possessions, she caught a most discouraging glance, as she passed the majestic mirrors in their costly frames, of a poor dejected looking figure, in miserable contrast with the elegant Mrs. Maxwell, glittering and sparkling with fresh brilliance at every movement.

Mary was still in deep mourning, and Harriet was in black, but it was of the richest satin; while, amongst the curls of her glossy hair, she wore a wreath of white roses, and a band of pearls. Mrs. Hilary, too, was all

urbanity, lace, and ribbons, and Mary asked, with some trepidation, whether they had company.

“ No,” said Harriet, “ nobody in the world ; only aunt Hilary, and Dr. Blanchard, and Miss Jones, and the mayor’s daughters, and two or three others—quite a family party, I assure you. I am distressed that we should have even these, just on the day of your arrival ; but, indeed, we may consider it fortunate that our party was not larger, for we have had quite a gay week—indeed, I might say month—so much so, that I have positively not had a moment for writing to any one. I was thinking, only this morning, that it would be really a relief to sit down with half a dozen friends in this quiet way. But your hair, Mary!—you are not going down with it in bands ? Do let Norton dress it for you. I assure you bands are not worn now.”

“ I would much rather be excused going down at all to-day,” said Mary ; “ I have tra-

velled all night, and I do not feel equal to meeting even your half dozen friends."

"Travelled all night!" exclaimed both ladies at once, holding up their hands in astonishment, as if they and their immediate connexions were removed to an immeasurable distance from such painful and degrading necessities; and Harriet, by no means solicitous that her sister should meet the guests convened that day around her husband's table, consented to Mary's having her tea up stairs, beside the comfortable fire in her dressing room, where she remained in uninterrupted quiet until long after she thought the ladies must have left the dinner table.

"Harriet will then come and sit with me," she said to herself, "for she must be anxious to hear of all the sad scenes that have taken place since she left us;" but instead of her sister coming with any such intention, she only visited her occasionally, for a few brief moments, accompanied almost every time by Mrs. Hilary, who kindly offered to remain; until

Mary, afraid of nothing so much as being condemned to her prattle for the remainder of the evening, declared her intention of retiring early to rest.

Harriet was of opinion it was much better that she should, and servants were immediately called in, and charged with preparing more comforts for Mary, than she knew how either to appropriate or value; while, as her sister politely wished her a good night, she could have exclaimed, in the language of her heart, that a genuine welcome was worth them all.

The wearied traveller was now surrounded with all that could invite and facilitate the approach of sleep,—supported by downy pillows, and shrouded within the impervious folds of rich damask curtains; yet it needed all the fatigues of her past journey to induce forgetfulness of the impression made upon her mind by the countenance and manners of her sister.

“She cannot be leading a rational or useful life,” said Mary to herself, recalling the light,

empty words with which she had filled up every moment of the time they had been together; “ she cannot love me as a sister, or intend to admit me into the secrets of her bosom, with that wild unsettled countenance, and that strange politeness that seems only to be assumed as a cloak for her real dislike to my presence.”

In the midst of these reflections, painful as they were, Mary fell asleep; and the morning found her refreshed and ready for the day, long before the household—before even the domestics, had shaken off their slumbers.

Mr. Maxwell looked really pleased to welcome Mary as his guest; but Harriet met her with a languid, weary countenance, that told far more plainly than the animation of the previous evening, what was the state of her feelings.

As nothing in the world could be more stupid than a *tête-à-tête* between Mr. and Mrs. Maxwell, they both felt inexpressible relief in

the presence of a third person, whoever it might be. When breakfast was over, it was Harriet's custom to leave her husband to his newspaper, and to betake herself to any employment that might afford her a plea for escaping. To leave Mary also behind her, on the present occasion, would scarcely have been consistent with the system of politeness she had adopted towards her; yet to subject herself to a close and confidential interview with her sister, was the thing she was most solicitous to avoid. She therefore opened the door of a room, the least frequented in the house, a small but elegant library; and assuring Mary that she had some half hundred letters and notes to write, hoped she would find herself interested until the time for making and receiving calls—an amusement to which Harriet devoted the greatest part of every day.

“ Can I assist you in any way ?” asked Mary.

“ In nothing, I assure you,” replied her sister; “ perhaps you would like to write home ?”

“ I should,” said Mary; “ have you any message ?”

“ My love, of course,” was answered by Harriet, in a tone of perfect indifference. She then opened her desk, and laying out all the materials for writing that could be wanted by a secretary of state, left the room, and returned not until her dress had been exchanged for an elegant morning costume, admirably adapted for displaying her figure to the best advantage.

Callers were now announced, and Harriet received her *dear friends* with the easy negligence of one who has long been accustomed to the habits of the fashionable world.

So many attacks were made upon the door in the space of two hours, that Mary had ceased to distinguish them, or to calculate upon what consequences they might produce ; and she sat, silently absorbed in one of those ill-bred reveries, which stamp with rusticity the unsophisticated inhabitants of the country—gazing intently upon her sister’s face, and more than

ever disposed to think Terence Malone had been right in pronouncing that she had no heart; when, at one particular knock, Harriet started almost from her seat, while a bright flush passed over her countenance, which she immediately rose to hide, and taking up a new engraving from the table, began to expatiate upon its beauties with more than usual volubility.

Mary now watched her sister narrowly, for, as the door opened, the old lady, to whom she had been showing off the picture, peeping over her spectacles, exclaimed, “ Frank Nugent, I declare! What can have brought him to town again?”

Something like a spell seemed to connect Mary's thoughts with the individual who now advanced, and the scene at the inn by the water side, which had occasioned so many vague calculations through the remainder of her journey, with the stranger and his companion, who so strikingly resembled the per-

son introduced as Frank Nugent. Indeed, she was convinced it must be the same, as a young man advanced, whose fair and glowing complexion, fine eyes, luxuriant light brown hair, and countenance of bold but dubious expression, gave him a title to be called beautiful rather than handsome, and gentlemanly rather than agreeable—at least to Mary, for his easy assurance was far from recommending him to her acquaintance.

It was a moment of deep interest to her, when he advanced towards her sister. She saw their eyes meet, but Harriet immediately turned away; while, so far from addressing him with her natural freedom, he seemed to be the only person in the room with whom she found it impossible to converse. It was not long, however, before this temporary embarrassment subsided; and by the time the last of the morning visitors had departed, Harriet was able both to jest and laugh with her lively friend, who declared his intention of remaining uninvited for the rest of the day.

The character of this guest, with the aid of public report, might be soon read by a judicious observer. Neglected by one parent, and blindly indulged by the other, Frank Nugent had learned to look upon his mother's talents less as an ornament, than a useless incumbrance ; because his memory could not furnish him with a single instance, from his cradle to the present hour, in which they had contributed to his own gratification ; though many occurred, on reviewing his past life, in which they had stood between him and the full enjoyment of the liberty and the influence his father would have awarded to him as his inalienable right. It was therefore a constant and familiar piece of pleasantry with him, to ridicule the high pretensions of Lady Nugent ; and Harriet who, like himself, had scarcely one agreeable association connected with the parental character, used to join heartily in the laugh raised at the expense of filial duty.

Such conversation, however brilliant, had

no charms for Mary; and after having seen on the present occasion much more than she wished of her sister's friend, she retired to her own room, professedly to dress for dinner; but with graver purpose, to ponder upon how she was to act in a case where appearances afforded so little for remark, but so much for painful reflection.

The bell, announcing the approach of that meal which constituted so important an epoch in Mr. Maxwell's daily life, allowed so much time for preparation, that Mary, after completing her simple duties at the toilet, descended, without once reflecting that the hour was little more than half expired.

On entering the parlour in her usually still and gentle manner, she was surprised to find her sister and Frank Nugent engaged in earnest conversation near the fire; but what shocked, as well as surprised her, was, that the gentleman held her sister's hand in his, apparently a willing captive; until Mary's

approaching step was heard, when Harriet, suddenly disengaging it, and exclaiming with astonishment that Mary was already dressed, rushed out of the room, with blushes of the deepest dye upon her cheek.

Mary took up a book. Frank Nugent hummed an Italian air. There was no common ground upon which two people, with tastes and habits so entirely opposite, could meet, and silence was at all times so irksome to the gentleman, that he also left the room.

The next person who appeared was Mr. Maxwell, with marks of uneasiness upon his rubicund face, which induced Mary to lay down her book, and endeavour to enter into conversation with him, with more interest than she had ever felt for him before; for it needed only the idea of slight, or suffering attached even to the most repulsive of human beings, to excite a kindly feeling in Mary's bosom.

Rightly supposing that the late election would be the favourite topic with her compa-

nion, she congratulated him upon its successful issue, and for one moment he smiled with real pleasure; but the next he was grave again, as if a troublesome thought had occurred—a thought which no eloquence could dispel, and no urbanity beguile.

What Mary's powers of conversation, had they been ten times more brilliant, would have failed to accomplish, was, however, partially effected by the glories of an excellent dinner, to which Mary, Frank Nugent, and their host and hostess sat down together.

As if in determined contrast to her husband, Harriet directed a palled and sickly glance upon the different viands spread before her. She attempted to eat, but repeatedly sent away the portion to which she had been helped, untouched. It was not so, however, with the choice wines, always abounding on Mr. Maxwell's table, with which Frank Nugent was permitted to fill her glass—we will not tell how often; nor say how his eyes met hers,

with an expression not to be mistaken ; while as he addressed the most pointed attentions to the lady, Mary's indignation rose to find that the gentleman, whose house and establishment he seemed to consider as highly honoured by the temporary accommodation they afforded him, was the object of an insolent and provoking familiarity, equally pointed, and impossible to be misunderstood.

When the two sisters took possession of the drawing room together, Harriet threw herself upon a couch, evidently exhausted both in mind and body ; for there is something peculiarly destructive to physical and mental health in this strife between what ought to be, and what is—this struggle to maintain appearances beneath the eyes we love, and the eyes that watch us for our good ; when, suddenly recollecting that time and opportunity would thus be given, for Mary to speak confidentially, she opened the piano, and played one tune after another in such rapid succession, yet

with such uncertain touch, that it was evident she played rather to stun, than to refresh or invigorate her own feelings.

Nor was it long before the sisters were joined by Frank Nugent, declaring he had escaped on hearing the alderman's first snore. Harriet now played more correctly, and with better selection of music; until her guest approaching the piano, bent over her, and whispered in silvery tones what Mary was not permitted to hear.

It is so painful to impose restraint upon others, however properly, by our own single presence, that Mary after opening half a dozen books, and finding it impossible to confine her attention to any, retired to her own chamber, less satisfied than ever with her sister's conduct, yet still entirely at a loss how to commence the painful duty whose claims upon her attention became daily and hourly more imperative.

The next morning Harriet was again pale,

languid, and dejected. Her health was evidently failing, and her spirits were so forced and unnatural, as to convey no sense of satisfaction to any one who observed her with eyes to look beyond the external surface of human affairs. Mr. Maxwell was not a man to take note of these things. He saw that his wife looked pale and languid at the breakfast table ; but as she always revived in company, especially in the evening, he was satisfied ; and believing it quite natural that a young girl should feel rather dull when confined to the society of an old man like himself, he extended his hospitality beyond his own comfort to please her.

There was one guest, however, upon whom he would willingly have closed his doors ; for though during the important affair of the election, Frank Nugent had been a most active and efficient agent, he had lately made himself so entirely at home beneath Mr. Maxwell's roof, at the same time that he showed so little re-

spect for the lord of the mansion, that the good-natured alderman, whose personal dignity was the only point on which his temper was assailable, wished his handsome young visitor anywhere but at his table. Not that the slightest feeling of jealousy had ever entered his mind; for those who possess unshaken confidence in their own recommendations are the last to be jealous. Besides which, he had no suspicion of his wife, for he knew nothing about affections, or sensibilities, nor dreamed of the possibility of a woman not loving the man she was bound to by the law of the land. All that he knew about the matter was, that he should be extremely glad if the young man, Frank Nugent, would remove his impertinence from his house for ever; and one day as he prepared to drive out alone with his fat ponies, after Harriet had refused to accompany him, he said to Mary as she assisted him to put on his great coat, "It is an extremely unpleasant thing, Miss Grey, to have the company of

people who don't choose to make themselves agreeable in one's house. Don't you think it is?"

Mary perfectly agreed with him, though wholly unconscious of the individual to whom this remark applied.

"Do you think," he added, opening the door again after he had wished her good morning, "that you could contrive some way of ridding me of the presence of that young Nugent, who seems to have mistaken my house for his own?"

"I wish from my heart I could," replied Mary, "for I assure you his company is as objectionable to me, as it can be to you."

"Well, Miss Grey," continued the alderman, drawing on his warm fur gloves, "you have my sanction for using any means you think proper, only keep me out of the scrape. Public men, you know, must have no private piques with their own party; but the sooner he is gone the better, Miss Grey—the sooner

the better." And he left her abruptly, for Harriet's step was at the door.

She appeared in her riding dress, looking dissatisfied with herself and with every one else; and, either repenting of her ungracious refusal to accompany her husband, recollecting that this was the only thing she could do to please him without positive disgust to herself, or thinking that she should thus escape the scrutiny of Mary's eye, she had come down with the determination of spending at least two hours in a manner as disagreeable to herself, as it was unexpected and welcome to her delighted companion.

It is true that by absenting herself for the whole morning, she would incur the risk of allowing Frank Nugent and her sister to meet alone; but Mary was so reserved, and the gentleman had so little wish to cultivate her acquaintance, that she believed they would not long remain together in the same room; and even if they did, Mary could not be other-

wise than charmed with so entertaining a guest.

Mary herself never thought of so disagreeable a dilemma as that of being subjected to a *tête-à-tête* with a companion so repulsive to her; but drawing her chair to the fire, and taking up her work, congratulated herself upon the comfort of spending a few hours without the interruption of morning calls.

Lost in reveries of no very pleasing nature, she was soon startled by a knock at the door, which she had learned to distinguish as that of Frank Nugent; and the next moment he entered the room where she was seated, looking round with evident chagrin at finding her alone.

“Good morning, Miss Grey,” said he, with a familiarity that savoured little of respect.
“Where is your sister?”

“She has gone out with Mr. Maxwell.”

“Whew!” was the unceremonious reply.

“When do you expect her back?”

“ I do not know.”

“ Bless me! that is rather remarkable;” and he drew a chair to the fire, as if to prove that he had as great a right to sit there as any one else.

“ If you have any message for my sister,” said Mary, in a cold undaunted tone, “ I can deliver it on her return.”

“ Oh no!” said her companion, piqued at her implied desire to get rid of him, “ I can wait. I shall not leave town before the evening. I am perfectly at leisure till ten or eleven.”

“ You are leaving the town?” said Mary, with a satisfaction in her countenance which she made no attempt to conceal.

“ Yes, ma’am. Is that an event of any importance to you?”

“ Of great,” said Mary, with the same coolness and composure.

Frank Nugent was a young man of consummate impudence, neither embarrassed by close contact with mental superiority, nor

repelled, where it was not his interest to be so, by personal contempt; yet there was something in Mary's voice and manner, so candid, yet so cold—so mild, yet so determined, that it struck him with a kind of awe he had never felt before, in the presence either of man or woman.

Still, he said to himself, he was not going to be brow-beaten by a poor pale-faced girl, like Mary Grey, and concealing his want of moral courage under the cover of impertinence, he resumed the thread of their extraordinary discourse.

“I am extremely proud, Miss Grey,” said he, “that any movements of mine are of sufficient importance to interest you.”

“You have no occasion to be proud, sir.”

“Indeed! I am distressed to hear you say so. Perhaps you will favour me so far as to explain the cause of this interest, that I may not flatter myself too much.”

“I will, sir. It would to me be so painful

to intrude my presence where it was not desired, that I cannot help wishing to relieve every one I see thus circumstanced from so distressing a situation. I therefore beg leave to remind you, that you are a frequent visitor at a house where you do not so much as believe yourself to be welcome."

Frank Nugent bit his lip, and his eyes flashed with burning passion, as he answered, "Not to you, perhaps."

"I have no right," said Mary, "to interfere with Mr. Maxwell's guests on my own account, nor would I wish to choose to whom his doors should, or should not be open. But I appeal to your own feelings, Mr. Nugent—I appeal to your feelings as a gentleman, whether you are acting a fair and honourable part, by taking advantage of your late public connexion, to force yourself upon the private peace of a man whom you treat with undisguised contempt; and to sit at his table, while you refuse him the common civility due from every guest?"

“Nor is this all I have to say,” added Mary; for Frank Nugent, roused to fury, was about to answer with a fresh burst of insolence. “I have appealed to your feelings as a gentleman, Mr. Nugent. I would now appeal to them as a man. I would ask you to look impartially into your own motives and mode of conduct in this family; and then, placing yourself in Mr. Maxwell’s situation, tell me whether you would not think yourself justified in calling in the aid of your servants to rid your house of such an intruder.

“I wish for no reply. I leave the question for your own private consideration; but I do hope, in wishing you good morning, that you and I may never meet upon the same terms beneath this roof again.”

As Mary said this, she rose with calmness and dignity, and left the apartment before she had time to hear her companion’s reply; and there is some reason to suspect, that the reply his angry passions wrung from him, as he

stood alone in the deserted room, was not such as ought to have met a lady's ear.

When Harriet returned from her long ride, expecting to find her home enlivened by the only society in which she now felt any pleasure, she found, instead, a note upon her dressing-table, in which the indignant feelings of her professed admirer were vented in language as harsh and ungenerous, as if she herself had been the offender. And he was gone—actually gone! His carriage had been seen to leave the town, and she was cut off from all hope of convincing him, by the kindness of a single look—a single word, that, despite the prejudice of those who watched her with their Argus eyes, she was still his faithful, his devoted friend.

We must do Harriet the justice to say, that nothing so imprudent as corresponding confidentially with Frank Nugent had yet formed part of her unguarded conduct; yet, in the vexation of the moment—in the agony of

having her own feelings misconstrued, by one whom she had, perhaps unconsciously to herself, regarded with too much tenderness, she hastily seized a pen with the design of clearing herself from all share in the unhandsome treatment she could not but suspect he had received beneath her roof.

The critical question how to commence her letter happily arrested the progress of her pen, as it probably has done that of many a pen besides; and casting it from her at the sound of the first dinner bell, she prepared mechanically to dress. But of what value now were any personal advantages? For whom should she wear the wreath of white roses, so often admired by Frank Nugent? For whom would the diamond glitter on her ivory finger, or the sparkling gems be mingled with her hair?

With the petulance of a spoiled child, who rejects every offered gift for the sake of the treasure it is impossible to obtain, she burst

into a flood of tears, that were scarcely dried as she descended to the dining-room, still in her morning dress; when, suddenly recollecting the unfavourable construction which might be put upon her unwonted neglect, she hurried back to her toilet, and cast around her a few unstudied ornaments, before she dared to meet her sister's eye.

Mary had too much consideration to appear to mark her sister narrowly; but with a delicacy and tact peculiar to herself, she kept up an animated conversation with Mr. Maxwell, while Harriet ate her scanty morsel in comparative comfort, persuading herself that she was wholly unobserved.

We have already said enough to lead the reader to suspect that Harriet had fallen into the fatal error, so common to the sanguine and undisciplined, who rush upon the ills of life without fortitude sufficient to sustain them with propriety—the error of applying to temporary stimulus for warding off the attacks of

mental suffering, or stunning the sense of pain ; and on this day it was, that, unable either to communicate, or endure with patience, her mingled feelings of anger, grief, and desperation, she threw herself, with total recklessness of consequences, upon those unlawful means by which the storm of mental anguish had too often been lulled to rest, only to awaken with fresh violence and power.

It was with perfect indifference, therefore, that she now accompanied her sister alone into the drawing room. She felt steeled against the worst ; and equally devoid of hope and fear, neither Mary's scrutinizing eye, nor the reproaches of her own conscience, had sufficient influence to awaken any acute sensation in her breast.

Harriet had never extended her indulgence in this way beyond what is commonly called excitement ; but now, when the real pain she had been suffering was excitement in itself, the indulgence tended rather to sooth

than to enliven her feelings; and Mary was encouraged by this transient and superficial calm, to introduce a subject that often trembled on her lips.

After taking a small casket from her work-box, she advanced towards her sister, and placing an elegant mourning ring upon her passive finger, she said at the same time, in a kind and gentle voice, "That ring contains the fair hair of Cathleen and our brother Allan. It is all the memorial I could bring you; but I am sure you will value it for the sake of those we loved so tenderly."

Harriet covered her face with her handkerchief, and burst into an agony of tears.

Mary was silent; she thought it was the natural and sacred sorrow of a sister, that moistened the eyes of the mourner. Alas! it was the bitter anguish of a seared and blighted soul, that wept its own apostacy, not from the outward forms of decency and decorum, but, in reality, from the worship of the God of

peace—from the sweet and social intercourse of noble and elevated minds—from the pleasant paths of beauty and innocence, which even earth affords—and from the holy fellowship of congenial spirits, whose home is in a world of light.

“ Harriet,” said Mary, while nothing but her sister’s deep convulsive sighs were heard, “ there is much to reconcile us to the loss of our beloved brother ;” and she went on to explain the sources of consolation of which she herself had so abundantly partaken ; but Harriet still wept, for Mary had not reached the root of her distress.

At last she said, “ It is not that, Mary ; I am altogether so miserable a wretch, that the loss of poor Allan scarcely finds a place in my heart.”

“ And why are you miserable, dear Harriet,” said Mary, “ when you are surrounded by all that you professedly delight in ?”

“ Why am I miserable ?” exclaimed Harriet,

and she sprung wildly from the couch, and clasped her hands like one who raves; "Why am I miserable, when I tread on rich carpets, and fill my purse with gold, and wear diamonds in my hair? Why am I miserable, indeed, when my heart is desolate amidst all this, and when I live for no purpose but to increase my own and others' wretchedness!"

"Ah, my dear sister!" said Mary, "the question what we live for, is one that strikes at the root of all human happiness and misery. But tell me, Harriet, if I do not come too near your secret thoughts—I entreat you to tell me truly, whether there is nothing but this want of purpose—this vacuity of life, that darkens your spirit like a cloud."

"Mary, I do not love my husband—I never did." And the wretched woman hid her face in her hands as if she had spoken words of deadly treason.

"But, Harriet, you respect him. You do not shrink from his presence."

Harriet looked up wildly. "I will not deny," she answered, "that there has come between me and my reason one other being who has rendered my hitherto tasteless portion in this life, one of unmingled bitterness—who has converted an object of indifference into one of loathing and horror. Nay, do not shun me, Mary. I have confessed all. I have no guilty secret to conceal, but what belongs to the wanderings of my own heart. The greatest familiarity that ever passed between him and me, you yourself have witnessed."

"Thank Heaven!" exclaimed Mary, with such fervency, that her sister internally responded to the ejaculation, for it warned her of the gulf she had escaped. "Thank Heaven!" Mary repeated once more. "We can now converse together with some degree of satisfaction. And oh, Harriet! if I can assist you with my love—with my life, they shall both be freely at your service."

"Thank you, Mary," said her sister, with a

look of despair—"Thank you for your kind intentions; but they are all fruitless, my case is beyond remedy."

"No, Harriet, that can never be, while the Father of heaven and earth looks down upon your tears, and hears your prayers."

"I tell you, Mary, my case is beyond remedy. Marriage is not the mere formal bond I thought it, when I cast myself away. Had Mr. Maxwell been a man of violent passions, I could have studied to assuage them. Had he been a man of vicious habits, and noble feelings, I should have had an object in gaining his affections. But a gross, bodily man, whose heart is in his palate, and his purse!—Oh, Mary! I have heard those terrible preachers who describe the horrors of infernal torment, dilate upon its lingering and interminable duration; and now I fully understand and feel their meaning, for every other earthly misery admits of hope—but mine has none!"

"Dear Harriet, you shall return with me, and we will talk of these things together."

“Why should I return with you, Mary? If I were to fly to the uttermost parts of the earth, the name I have so thoughtlessly—so wickedly assumed would be ever sounding in my ears, and the claims of a husband would lay like a mountain of ice upon my heart.”

“Harriet,” said Mary, laying her hand upon her sister’s arm, “this is not the way in which it can serve either of us to converse together. I feel as deeply as you can, that your situation admits of no consolation but what arises from the merciful interposition of an almighty Father; to whom the humble and fervent prayers of his children never ascend in vain.”

“But Mary,” said Harriet, with impatience, “I have no heart to pray. Prayer will not change the character of my husband, or make me love him.”

“It is impossible for us, Harriet, to say what prayer can do. Our duty is not to calculate upon the mode of its operation, or the scope of its influence, but simply to regard it as the means prescribed by Him who knew

what was in the heart of man, to keep us near to the fountain of eternal love. It is because I know too feelingly what must be the difficulties of your present situation, that I point to the duty of prayer, as the only available consolation. It is because we cannot, by our natural unassisted powers, so regulate the tide of our affections, as always to love where we ought; and because the woman who is uncongenially married has not the common privilege of misery—not even a right to complain, that to her, above all other human sufferers, I would recommend an entire surrender of the heart to Him who knows its wandering thoughts, its secret worship, and its alienated love.”

Mary paused, and Harriet answered with a sigh, “All this is very well from the pulpit, but it does not apply to my case.”

“Then return home with me, dear Harriet,” said her sister, “and I will try to think of some consolation that may.”

“I cannot go with you, Mary. The cold austerity of Welbourne House would be intolerable to me now.”

“I thought, Harriet, you were so miserable here, that almost any change would be a relief.”

“It would,” said Harriet. She then paused a moment, and added, “Yes, I will go with you. But you must keep my secret. And when you see me laugh, and talk, and assume the part I have acted so long, don’t suppose I am the less miserable for that. But promise me, Mary, that you will keep my secret.”

“I will indeed, keep your secret,” replied Mary, still holding her sister’s hand; “I will keep it to the last day of my life. I will do any thing else for you that is reasonable, if you in your turn will promise me one thing.”

“What is that, Mary?”

“That you will not endeavour, by unlawful stimulants, to keep up a show of cheerfulness which you do not feel.”

“ I dare not say I will not, because I do not yet know how much is in my power ; but with your assistance I will make the attempt.”

“ Then good night, dear Harriet. Remember it is a fearful practice, ruinous to all good resolutions, and the certain prelude to final despair. Good night, once more, and may the God of mercy pour balm into the bitter cup of which you have to drink !”

CHAPTER III.

THE next morning found Harriet an altered being. Angry and disgusted with herself for having betrayed so much of the real state of her feelings, she had already begun to waver in her resolution to accompany her sister; for, on awaking to the presence of that world which, in spite of its bondage, she loved too well, it had again appeared too captivating to be wholly resigned; and the cold dull calm of her father's family, too irksome to be endured. In fact, she was just forming a decided refusal into plausible and gentle words, when Mary entered her room with an open letter in her hand, and with looks indicating unusual agitation of mind.

“ I am sorry to find,” said she, “ that my father is very seriously indisposed,—so much so, that I believe I must hasten home immediately.”

For one moment Harriet looked as if relieved at the prospect of thus escaping from her sister’s vigilance ; but her better feelings returned, and throwing her arms around her neck, she said, in a voice scarcely articulate, “ Then I will go with you, Mary, after all. My father’s illness is a plea that will screen me from remark ; and you shall either send me back a wiser and a better wife, or send me where I know I shall soon be—raving with other maniacs in a mad-house.”

“ Hush, Harriet !” said Mary. “ Let us think of my poor father ;” and hurrying down stairs, she laid the case before Mr. Maxwell, with so much earnestness, tempered by discretion, that he granted a full and free consent to Harriet’s visiting her paternal home—a consent which had no opposing influence, but

his extreme concern about the difficulties of the long journey, and the many personal privations so indelibly impressed upon his memory, which he knew his delicate wife would have to put up with during her residence at Welbourne House.

While the business of preparation was going on, the unsuspecting husband was so kindly attentive to everything connected with Harriet's welfare, that Mary could not help wishing his wife had been some simple, worthy, honest-hearted woman, who might have gratefully appreciated his anxious wish to please ; instead of a wayward and capricious girl, who never loved him less, than when, actuated solely by the best of motives, he bustled about from room to room, fatigued himself in her service, and intruded his portly person upon her notice every moment with some new scheme or proposition, whose sole object was her own personal benefit.

So carefully had every contingency been

provided for on the present occasion, and so ample had been the means employed for the promotion of the travellers' comfort and convenience, that they were able to perform their long journey with little sacrifice of the home feeling so rarely belonging to the welcome of an inn. It was, notwithstanding, neither cheerful nor pleasant; for Harriet, not half resigned to her situation, found it difficult to converse freely with one whose mode of thinking and acting differed so widely from her own, and the humbling confessions she had recently made to her sister, unsupported by any deep or lasting determination to turn them to good account, seemed to leave her painfully exposed to the searching eye, whose very purity she had now learned to dread. While Mary, on the other hand, had many serious thoughts to meditate upon in connexion with her father's indisposition, and with the perilous circumstances in which she had found her sister placed. Nor will we assert that she was so much above

the weakness of her sex, as not to lose herself in many a silent reverie upon the events of her last journey, and the mysterious character partially unfolded to her; as we behold some object in transient vividness while the glare of the lightning is upon it, and then lose it for ever in the depth of impenetrable darkness.

Mary soon discovered that her father was more ill than he had chosen to confess; for much as he valued personal importance, he had an intense aversion to every thing of the nature of bustle and confusion; and the interference of doctors, nurses, and all such authoritative people in his domestic establishment, was an assumption he could not endure with common civility or patience.

His illness was the consequence of a severe cold, from which he had been suffering without complaint for many days; but no sooner had Mary observed his quick and painful respiration, than she sent immediately for a phy-

sician, who spoke with so much confidence of alarming symptoms of pulmonary disease, that every precaution to which the patient would submit was studiously adopted; and when he found there was no other way of putting an end to persuasion, and preventing tumult, he did the only thing he could to preserve his dignity—he submitted as if it had from the first been a matter of choice to act in accordance with the advice of those around him.

One thing alone seemed to lie heavy on his heart, and nothing but the presence of his son James could relieve it from this burden. James accordingly was written to, and he came on the first application, with a countenance so long and mournful, that poor Stephen Grey thought, what a blessing it was to have one dutiful and devoted child!

The business on which this exemplary son had been summoned, was to make some alteration in his father's will, which lay untouched since Allan's death; but we will not be so

uncharitable as to surmise, that his hasty journey was accelerated, and his countenance lengthened, in the hope that a transfer might be made of his late brother's portion to himself. Such, however, was the case; and no sooner was this matter settled, than the affectionate son began immediately to see his father better, though every one else believed him to be growing worse. The fact was, he wished impatiently to be again centred in his own affairs, and feeling no real tenderness to detain him near his father's restless pillow, he gladly persuaded himself there was no need to stay; nor was it until the physician pronounced his patient decidedly worse, that he yielded reluctantly to the claims of duty, and took his turn in attending in the sick chamber.

In all the sad and anxious scenes necessarily accompanying the alarming illness of an influential and respected parent, Harriet took a willing and able part, for no one seemed to have time or inclination for thinking of them-

selves; and perhaps nothing could have occurred so well calculated to wean her from unprofitable and rebellious thoughts, as the necessity for exertion which this illness induced. Yet it was with a slow and languid step, but little like her own, that she performed her daily task; and Mary saw with extreme concern that she was wearing herself away with a melancholy recklessness as to what might subsequently be her own peculiar fate.

Amongst the kindest and most indefatigable of Stephen Grey's attendants, was Terence Malone, whose character always appeared to advantage on every serious and important occasion; and while the idea of losing a member of their social circle, perhaps after all less feared than esteemed, cast a gloom over every countenance, Mary thought she detected in that of her early playmate, a gravity beyond what, all things considered, might have been expected from him. But she had long since

settled it in her own mind that marriage is a serious business, and what she had lately seen tended greatly to confirm this belief. Nor was the fair Ellen backward in her attentions. She came periodically to sit beside her father, for a certain length of time each day, looking also very grave, and rather sad; and such was the general excitement, that even George Grey sent over a man on his own horse, more than once, to inquire after his father's health, though he refused to risk his own person, again within the doors of Welbourne House.

At last, to the relief of all parties, the patient was pronounced to be out of danger; and Mary, who sat with him through the following night, spoke cheerfully, and encouraged her father to speak on easy and familiar subjects, though for the last few days all such exertion had been strictly forbidden.

But never was any task more difficult to perform than that of conversing cheerfully with Stephen Grey; for to address to him that com-

mon chit chat, not by any means to be despised, since it opens the way for something better, was an absurdity which had always met with so severe and decided a repulse, that his children had learned to avoid making the attempt; and now, when such familiar intercourse might have beguiled the tedious hours of convalescence, Mary sat beside her father, trembling lest every effort of her voice should be regarded as an impertinence.

It was, therefore, much to her relief that he took the burden of conversation upon himself.

“ These,” said he, in his usually grave, cold manner, “ are searching times. I suppose I have been—indeed I have felt myself to be, very near the grave; and, with eternity before us, it becomes an awful task to ask for what purpose we have lived. I believe—I hope I have preserved an upright character before mankind; but it has lately appeared to me, that not only the character itself, but the end for which that character is maintained, is important to be looked to.”

“ I believe,” said Mary, with extreme diffidence, “ that it is quite possible to pursue a correct path, from no better motive than that of standing well before the eyes of men ; and I should think that the silent hours of illness are seasons when much that had previously appeared admirable or praiseworthy, would be stripped from the aspect of earthly things.”

“ It is so,” said her father ; “ and I now feel almost at a loss how to regard many subjects, on which I once thought myself particularly clear.”

“ I believe,” observed Mary, “ the great point is, to put away expediency from our thoughts, and to look simply at the two grand principles of good and evil. You, my dear father, must have been sensible, during the course of the serious reflections to which you allude, that the censure, as well as the approbation of mankind, is bestowed upon actions, rather than motives—upon consequences, rather than the means by which such consequences are produced.”

“ I have ; and I have marvelled that it should be so, seeing that our motives, and the means we make choice of to accomplish what we desire, are the surest tests of principle.”

“ We find, for instance,” continued Mary, “ that those who take upon themselves the care of the tender feelings of childhood, judging from consequences alone, will not unfrequently deal out the same punishment to him who commits an accidental error, as to him who wilfully and deliberately does wrong ; and that when persons of more mature understanding act under the influence of mental delusion, a just distinction is rarely made between their having involuntarily deceived themselves, and designedly deceived others—whereas one is merely an error, the other a determined violation of moral law ; but the consequences being the same, the censure of mankind is bestowed with equal severity upon both. Now it has often struck me, father,

that the great business of a moral agent—the paramount duty of every parent, who would educate his children for a higher and a holier state of existence, is to keep a strict watch over cases similar to these ; and, with a single eye to what is meet for divine as well as human approbation, to cherish the good, under whatever form it may appear, and in such a manner, as that the two ideas of virtue and happiness should be indissolubly associated in the opening mind.”

“ Yes,” replied Stephen Grey ; “ but we are taught that the life of the Christian is one of constant warfare ; that in this world he is but a wanderer and an alien, without either home or rest ; how, then, should his portion be one of happiness ?”

“ Not of gross or selfish happiness, most assuredly,” said Mary ; “ but, alas, what incalculable injury is done to the cause of religion, by representing it as a system that necessarily excludes all natural enjoyment. Oh, my fa-

ther, while we live, let us remember that the only foundation of real happiness, upon which we can with safety build, is so rational—so elevated in its nature, and at the same time so admirably adapted to the faculties of man, that it not only gives a zest to all his simple pleasures, but at the same time raises his purest and most intellectual aspirations to the highest point of laudable ambition.

“ Dear father, let us not only remember this important truth, but so recommend the belief of it to others, that if we have erred in any case by making religion appear unlovely before the eyes of men, we may endeavour to atone to our heavenly Father by labouring with our hearts and hands in the spread of its benignant influence, and by doing humble, but fervent homage to its beauties, and its consolations.”

Stephen Grey was silent, and Mary said no more. Perhaps the time was past for him to make any serious alteration in his mode of conduct; for habit, so potent in its influence over all, was to him like an iron chain under

which he moved without the power to add or take away a single link. But whether it was from the reduced number of his family—whether the words of his daughter had sunk deep into his heart—or whether his reflections upon a sick bed had really worked a change in his theory of morals; it was observed by all who knew him, that from the time of his illness, Stephen Grey was less harsh in his manners to those around him, and less imperative in his mode of enforcing obedience.

Still the outward character of the man was the same, and when Harriet first saw the tall, gaunt figure of her father descending to the common sitting room, she was strongly reminded of a picture she had somewhere seen of Lazarus in his grave clothes; while, acting from the impulse of the moment, she would have escaped by an opposite door, had not Mary claimed her assistance in making some arrangements for the accommodation of the invalid.

Whilst the illness of Stephen Grey was at

its height, a general sympathy had been excited for him, as it would have been for any other sufferer worthy in an equal degree of general respect. At that time, too, when he lay helpless and feeble as a child, it was impossible to fear him ; but no sooner was he seen to raise himself to his full height, and heard to speak again in the cold, harsh tones of his well-known voice, than old associations returned as powerfully as ever upon those who had felt the influence of the iron rule by which he governed ; and so far from being welcomed with cheerful cordiality to the familiar scenes of domestic life, he was again left by all who could escape from his presence, and addressed only when it could not be avoided, with a distant and formal respect.

It was hard upon Mary Grey that all the lingering hours of her father's convalescence should be shared by him and her alone ; but no sunny countenance brightening with smiles on his return to health, looked in upon their

solitude ; there came no social friend to entertain him with the gossip of the day, nor welcome step to relieve the tedium of those long, dull evenings ; and Mary, ever faithful to her trust, had no alternative but to read, talk, or be silent by turns, calculating as nearly as she could which would be least objectionable to her father ; for, as to pleasing him, it was a thing entirely beyond the reach of her most aspiring hopes, few people being able to remember the time when Stephen Grey had evinced any signs of being gratified by personal kindness or attention. To speak and act so as to avoid exciting his anger or contempt, was all his children ventured to aim at, and on the present occasion Mary succeeded to her heart's content.

While Stephen Grey remained a close prisoner in his own chamber, while the interest of his critical situation lent a temporary excitement to every member of his household ; and while there was really a great deal of active employment for those who were disposed

to be useful, Harriet felt more satisfaction than she had anticipated in being present at such a time ; but when her father seemed once more to fill with his awful presence the whole range of the lower apartments of the house, and that not as formerly for a few hours in the morning and evening, but for the whole of each day, she felt as if there was no shelter for her head—no rest for the sole of her foot ; and perhaps there were lingering thoughts impossible to be communicated, that created an unconquerable desire to return to her husband's home, even with all its vexations, and with all its griefs.

Whether this desire originated in the discomforts of Welbourne House, or in the restlessness of an ill-disciplined mind, hoping to find relief from any change ; such was Harriet's evident wish to be gone, that when her intention was communicated to her sister Mary, she was with great delicacy pressed to prolong her visit, but at the same time set entirely at

liberty to act as she thought best. Indeed, Mary had been too well pleased to see her sister entering with cordiality and kindness into her domestic duties, during the time of their father's illness, to have thought it necessary to recur to the painful subject of Harriet's distressing situation; yet she could not suffer her to depart without farther notice of it, because she dared not hope that she was returning sufficiently fortified against the peculiar temptations of her home. She therefore compelled herself to perform that most unwelcome, most arduous duty of a Christian's life; and, by returning to the theme she would most gladly have dismissed for ever from her thoughts, convinced her sister, that notwithstanding the most favourable appearances, she was still an object of suspicion and distrust.

Of all the miserable consequences of human error, there is not one more lamentable than this; that the wanderer who has but recently returned to the right path, with the best inten-

tions to pursue it for the future, must necessarily be followed by the watchful eyes of those who doubt his sincerity; while his wounded spirit writhes beneath the agony of injurious suspicion, without the power to cast it off, and to stand erect in the conscious dignity of moral worth.

Whether the wanderer we have described smarted beneath this unavoidable injustice, or whether, when the pure lips of her sister pressed upon her cheek their farewell kiss, she knew in the secret of her heart how little she deserved that sister's confidence, was between her heart and heaven; for she made no promises, no confessions, but left her resolutions to the proof, which after events abundantly supplied.

As Stephen Grey recovered his former health, and resumed his wonted habits, Mary found time to bestow the attention she had promised her friend, upon the settlement of Herbert Lee in the neighbouring village of Welbourne,

where, either through the influence of his brother Elliott, or that of the rector of Branden, he had lately been appointed to the duties of the church, as curate to that reverend gentleman; with such a salary as rendered it necessary for him to be satisfied with a very humble establishment, and a very limited enjoyment of household comforts.

This, however, was of trifling moment to one who was at the same time a profound scholar, an invalid, and a candidate for no other honour than that of faithfully performing the duties of a christian minister. But as Mary Grey had the charge of choosing his habitation, she took care that it should be one as capable as could be found of those domestic comforts to which he had been accustomed.

Both from habit and necessity Mary was an excellent economist; and when she first took Terence Malone and Harriet with her to judge whether every thing had been provided really

essential to the convenience and respectability of a young clergyman, Terence had been delighted to see the metamorphosis wrought by the good taste and good will of a rational and energetic woman.

“I wish,” said he, “you would teach Ellen some of this economical cleverness.”

“Ah!” said Harriet, smiling, “economical cleverness is what all men value above every other virtue in their wives; and while they graciously accord to them the merit of saving, the pleasure of spending is what they would reserve for themselves.”

“Mary, defend me!” exclaimed Terence; “I have sometimes been your champion in former days.”

“I will defend you,” replied Mary with warmth, “for never was there a more generous or indulgent husband.”

“Thank you, Mary, with all my heart. You were always my good angel. Now, Harriet, I defy you.”

But Harriet had turned away, for she had no heart to speak of former days. She found no entertainment in the raillery that touched upon married life; nor had Terence that jocund hilarity about him, when the happiness of husbands and wives was the subject of conversation, that flows out from the secret store of internal satisfaction possessed by those, who, in the important affair of selecting a companion for life, have chosen wisely and well.

“Marriage,” thought Mary, as she contemplated the two most familiar instances it presented to her view, “is but an unpalatable portion after all; and had not the countenance of Terence betrayed a degree of disappointment too deep to be the subject of a jest, she would sometimes have been tempted to remind him of the high notions he had formerly held, when expatiating with extravagant enthusiasm on the felicity of connubial life.

Not that his fair wife was any thing but lovely still. Graceful in all her movements,

polished and gentle in her manners, she was exactly the wife to show off before the world, and might have sustained its strictest scrutiny with unblemished reputation ; for never was she known to deviate from what was ladylike, or from what is conventionally called correct. But in an isolated situation like the Abbey Grange, where her cheerful companionship should have created a charm as genial, and far more extensive in its influence, than the glow of her own warm hearth, she was like a dead weight upon her husband's spirits, perpetually requiring of him the enlivening impulse which she, in her turn, ought to have supplied, or else sinking into listless inactivity and silent reserve.

While under the shelter of Mary's protecting wing, and stimulated by her invigorating influence, Ellen could blush, and smile, and glide about, and make judicious but commonplace remarks with so correct an emphasis, and in so sweet a voice, that few persons were

aware, and Terence least of all, how much she was indebted for the beauty of her character to the superior strength, vigour, and intensity of her sister's feelings, which seemed to cast a sort of halo around every object invested with the treasure of her affections.

Even Mary herself had so loved the motherless child, and so doted on her personal attractions, and her apparently faultless mind, that she was long in opening her eyes to any real deficiency; for Ellen was talented and accomplished, and wanted nothing but the warmth of a generous and affectionate heart to render her a delightful woman.

This, however, was a want of such immense importance in the consideration of her husband, that no sooner had Harriet left her father's house, than Mary Grey began to fear she should a second time be made that most unenviable of all confidants—the confidant of an unhappy marriage.

Could any exertions of her own have reme-

died the evil she saw gathering around those whose happiness or misery she deeply shared, it is needless to say that neither pain nor difficulty, nor any consequences in which she alone was involved, would have found any place in her considerations. But in a case of so much delicacy, how should a third person interfere, or to what particular point could her interference be directed? Terence had married from what is commonly called love. The defects of his wife were such as could not be corrected without re-modelling her nature; and if the consequences of his marriage were not that fruition of enjoyment he had so fondly anticipated, they were such as no other human being could avert.

We have said that Mary Grey had parted from her sister Harriet without the cheering confidence which would have robbed that parting of all its bitterness; and now that her father had resumed his usual occupations, she was left to cherish her anxious apprehensions

in secret and loneliness, interrupted only by the company of Terence Malone, who came oftener than the day with many plausible excuses for seeking her society; or by visiting her sister Ellen, who failed not to demand her willing assistance, as well in every domestic arrangement, as for enlivening the monotony of what she was accustomed, even in the presence of her husband, to call her melancholy home.

Nor was her young friend Herbert Lee, now settled in his humble house in the village, without his share in Mary's kind attentions; and often when she went to inquire after his delicate health, or to introduce him to his sick or suffering parishioners, she would ask Terence Malone to be her companion, scarcely deeming her own age sufficient to sanction this matronly interference.

It was on the afternoon of one of those fine spring days, when the rooks fly wheeling and cawing over the trees in which they finally

settle, and prepare to build their own and their children's homes—when the primroses peep out like yellow stars from the green banks, and the lambs run wild upon the grassy downs, and the earth feels firm and elastic beneath the tread of the traveller's foot, that Mary and Terence went cheerfully over the fields to Welbourne, sighing only as they crossed the river by the stone bridge, and, looking down the stream, reflected in deep silence upon the wreck its cruel waters had made.

Nor was it because Terence was by her side, that Mary spoke and smiled with quiet satisfaction in her looks, but because she was pursuing a course of active usefulness, and not harbouring in her heart a single thought injurious to her own, or others' peace.

Her object in going to Welbourne on this day, was to convey some needful assistance to a sick neighbour, and she proposed to conclude her social duties by partaking of that usually questionable gratification—a bachelor's tea.

They found the young student buried amongst his books, but he started with delighted surprise on beholding the welcome intruders, and received them with the true politeness of a gentleman.

Indeed, Herbert Lee was a gentleman in the highest sense of the word—in mind, as well as person—in feeling as well as education. Tall, graceful, and dignified in his figure, but far too pale and delicate to possess any decided claims to manly beauty, he spoke with the easy fluency of one whom nature has gifted with a language for every emotion of his expansive soul, and to whom education has imparted the ability to render that language the most pure, and the most persuasive. He was in all respects qualified for a powerful and popular preacher of the gospel, whose truths were the support and the guide of his own life; and those who felt the influence of his eloquence, his zeal, and his irreproachable example, had nothing to regret, except that

such influence should be confined within so narrow and so humble a sphere.

It is true the church of Branden, where he frequently performed the duty of a minister, was in the immediate vicinity of Nugent Park; but the family were seldom there, and still less frequently did they honour that lowly edifice with their presence.

Herbert Lee, though something of a book-worm, and a recluse besides, could, when in the society of congenial minds, render himself an interesting and delightful companion, and never did the voice of Mary Grey salute his ear, but he was all attention; though it was said that there were less melodious voices whose loudest tones would fail to divert him from the page on which he pored. With Terence, too, he was easy and unreserved; and when the three friends sat down together around his frugal board, there was no lack of pleasant and cheerful conversation.

“The moon is rising,” said Mary at last,

“ we must not sit gossiping here. My father will find his home so lonely.”

“ He will scarcely like it the less for that,” observed Terence.

“ And poor Ellen!” continued Mary with a look of reproach.

Terence said no more, for he had really not been thinking of her, and his conscience smote him for the neglect. He therefore prepared without farther hesitation to depart; and when they were again out in the open air, he drew Mary’s hand within his arm, and they both walked on in silence.

At last he spoke in a voice so deep and sad, it was scarcely like his own.

“ Mary,” said he, “ yon moon has often shone upon us in our evening rambles. Do you remember one particular night when we stood together by the river side?”

“ What night do you mean, Terence?” said Mary, endeavouring to persuade herself that she did not really know.

“No matter, Mary,” he replied; “if you do not remember it, that is sufficient.”

“I remember so many evenings spent with you—” Mary replied, with great simplicity, when, stopping suddenly, he grasped her hand, and exclaimed, “Do you, Mary? Do you remember them with pleasure? Ah! tell me that you do, for there is no voice that speaks to me now in such sweet and soothing words as I have heard from you.”

Mary was startled—embarrassed—shocked, but she thought it most prudent not to understand his meaning in its gravest sense; she therefore answered, with a forced smile, “You know you are a married man, Terence. You must not expect sweet things to be said to you now.”

“But I have surely a right to expect something in return for all the affection I have lavished so unsparingly. Tell me what it is, Mary.”

“Gratitude, most assuredly, as unbounded

as your generosity ; and affection as disinterested as your own."

Terence again seized Mary's hand, placed it within his arm, and hurried on.

" Mary," said he, in a tone of bitterness, " never again talk of what people have a right to expect in married life : they must take what falls to their lot ; and I must be satisfied with my portion of disappointment. But I sometimes think if I had not been blinded—stupified—bewildered, by my admiration of mere beauty, I might have been a happier and a better man."

Mary felt it was no longer safe to trifle ; she felt also the stern duty of speaking directly to the point ; and cherishing no thought in her own bosom for which she ought to have blushed, even beneath that pale moon, with memorials of all she had felt and suffered immediately around her, she answered calmly and clearly, " My dear brother, this subject is one whose free discussion can only tend to your own unhappiness, and the injury of another.

If, therefore, you wish that I should be to you a sister indeed, it must be strictly and imperatively forbidden, as the theme of our private conversation.

“ You had, previously to your marriage, every opportunity of judging for yourself. You formed a free, unbiassed, unhesitating choice, upon which you acted, without influence or persuasion. Think, then, how ungenerous it is to the wife you thus selected from the whole world, to complain that she is not in all respects what you wished or expected to find her. Ellen is more exempt than the generality of her sex from glaring or decided faults. If she has deceived us, it has been without design, and we ought rather to blame ourselves for want of penetration, than her for want of sincerity. Indeed, we have much to blame ourselves for, as regards my poor sister. I, most especially, for having permitted her, in early life, to seek her own gratification before all other things; and you for having encou-

raged the idea that she was faultless, until it became her own belief. We have, therefore, a great duty to accomplish, by way of redeeming the past ; but let us perform this duty with tenderness, consistency, and perfect candour ; remembering at the same time, that by speaking disparagingly of our friends and near connexions, without having openly and faithfully endeavoured to correct their faults, we commit a culpable breach of moral rectitude ; that the man who would complain of his wife, without being able to charge her with any direct violation of conjugal duty, has not, on the face of the whole earth, a lawful or proper confidant ; and that the woman, who, under such circumstances, submits to the degradation of being his confidant, deserves to sacrifice the esteem of her own sex, and the respect of his."

Terence made no reply, and Mary, too, was silent, until they reached the entrance of her father's garden ; where, extending her hand to

her companion, she said in a kind and soothing voice—" Good night, Terence. Let what has passed between us this evening be buried in oblivion. But do not, I entreat you, do not let it operate against your calling upon me for all the services which the most affectionate, the most grateful, and the most devoted of sisters can render.

" No, Terence, you must not turn away so coldly—you must not leave me without a word. I will not let you go till you have made me that promise. Look into the past, Terence. See what I have been to you, and you to me. Is friendship such as ours to be shaken at last? Do I not understand all that you are feeling, sufficiently to sympathise with you still? It rests with you to decide, whether you will seal up the fountain of this sympathy for ever, or suffer it to flow unrestrained, as when we shared the heedless hours of childhood together."

" Mary," replied Terence, " you shall be my sister still—my good genius—my guardian

angel; for I cannot live if you are less, and it is now impossible that you should be more. Good night!" and they both turned away in silence to their respective homes.

CHAPTER IV.

WHEN Mrs. Maxwell departed from her father's house, it was chiefly with a desire to escape from the irksome restrictions which its well-known austerity imposed. For, though fully aware of the force of Mary's arguments, as well as of the right application of her advice, and sensible also of the beneficial influence of her example, she had not yet learned to love the ways of holiness and peace, or to regulate her tastes by what the necessity of a stricter walk enjoined.

Having in early life imbibed the idea, which her father's injudicious treatment had tended to confirm, that she was a being of inferior

grade, appointed to a low place in the moral world, and that, consequently, there were many high and important duties from which she was exempt, she had been accustomed to allow herself a license, both in thought and action, fatal alike to purity of mind, and dignity of character.

“ It is all very well for you, because you are one of the religious,” or “ such a thing can do me no harm ; it cannot make me worse than I am,” were answers she had made use of from early childhood, to repel her sister’s warnings or advice ; and though in her graver moments she would now sometimes refrain from such idle retorts, the same language was in her heart, and the same feeling influenced her life.

Placing her sister Mary in her own situation, Harriet could see in a moment what *she* ought to do, or to leave undone ; but she could not, or would not believe, that the same duties were required of her, because she had been early taught that she was worthless, treated as if

she was so, and told that she would be so to the end of her life. She had therefore no laudable ambition, no desire but to escape from present suffering, and no delight but in the excitement by which her sense of suffering was allayed.

On returning to her own home, she was received by her husband with a welcome so warm, so cordial, and so entirely divested of all apprehension about her not feeling the same warmth in return, that she almost wished herself back again at Welbourne House, rather than endure once more the painful necessity of appearing pleased, while disappointment, vexation, and disgust lay heavy at her heart.

But soon, alas, too soon, she fell into her former habits, and forgot, or tried to forget, that human life was appointed for any thing but a scene of dissipation and amusement. And old friends—nay, half the town, came flocking to her morning levee, either to welcome her back, or to see what she was dressed in ; and Aunt Hilary sat with her from morn-

ing till night, telling her all the gossip of the place, and all the good she had done in the absence of her niece; though some people thought Mrs. Hilary's good was not so apparent to others as to herself, and therefore they hinted, she was obliged to tell of it.

Harriet, however, was a willing listener, for her aunt's benevolent actions were intimately connected with the domestic affairs of the people around her; and the paradoxical part she performed by acting the marplot, whenever she thought to set things right, afforded her niece a never-failing source of amusement.

It was well for the purity of Harriet's reputation, and, perhaps, still better for the peace of her own mind, that Frank Nugent came no more. He had set off on a journey soon after the insult offered him beneath the alderman's roof; and thus had taught the woman, for whom he had so recently professed the warmest admiration, a lesson of forgetfulness

which she was not slow to learn ; for their intimacy had been only that of the passing hour, founded on idleness and frivolity, and cherished by vanity on one side, and falsehood on the other ; yet still, though worthless and heartless in itself, it had been of that dangerous description which is not unfrequently of sufficient importance to blast the reputation of a wife, and ruin her domestic peace.

By way of reconciling her conscience to the course she was now pursuing, Harriet had frequent recourse to the reflection, that as Frank Nugent was gone, and had left her whole of heart, there was nothing very culpable in her life, either to be condemned or apprehended ; and therefore she fluttered on, like the butterfly, from hour to hour, but, alas, without its innocence, and without its power to fly away and be at rest.

It is true there were times when her reflections were almost intolerable—when the humbler gratifications of those whose tastes were more simple and more refined, sent the poison

of envy rankling to her secret soul ; and when faint glimpses of a better and a holier life—of what she might have been, came stealing through the calm of evening, through the moon's pure rays, and through the silent depth of midnight, like the glow of his own fireside, seen afar off amongst the mountains, to the man who perishes with cold. And to these partial and fitful lights, serving but to make the darkness in which she dwelt more visible, she owed the fresh stimulus with which she rushed into society, or drowned her senses in oblivion.

To the eye of a superficial observer, the conduct of Mrs. Maxwell had nothing really culpable in it. She only dressed, and went abroad, and visited, and danced, and laughed like other people ; but the recorder of her follies is one who believes that the soul of man is always progressing towards good or evil, and far indeed from her experience, was the attainment of any good.

If the human mind be left to lie waste, it

will, like every other wilderness, produce innumerable weeds. If the desires and affections of our nature are not cultivated for useful and benevolent purposes, they will produce fruits as monstrous as unpalatable ; and the unhappy being we have been describing, who did not even try to love her husband, discovered, when it was too late, that he was the object of her dislike.

It had often been said, and said falsely of Harriet, that she had no heart, but no one had ever pronounced her to be without passions ; and when she had once yielded to the influence of a deep-rooted antipathy to her unconscious husband, she saw him odious in every light, and repulsive under every form. She could not hear him speak, nor answer him, with patience. She could not force herself to comply with his most simple request, without hating him the more for having made it. Nor could she cast her eye, even upon the mere shadow of his person, without beholding it

distorted beyond the fair proportions of a man.

We are inclined to think that the state into which Harriet was rapidly falling, though wearing the outward character of decency, is perhaps the most extreme in its degradation and its misery, of any that human life affords us the means of contemplating. Here was nothing to refine the nature, or soften the edge of suffering; no cherished hope, even of distant and forbidden things, to impart a false gloss to the more immediate; but a dull, dead waste of mental darkness, only not infernal, because it wanted the impress of the awful seal of eternity.

Let no human voice presume to say of the dominion of evil, Thus far shalt thou extend, and no farther. It matters not, whether within the walls of the religious sanctuary, or in the bandit's mountain cave; whether within the private circle of domestic comfort, or in more public scenes of rapine, strife, or blood-

shed ; if the heart be willingly surrendered to the influence of evil, the powers of darkness will work out their fatal purpose, and fulfil their office of destruction.

It was so with the erring creature whose footsteps we have thus far traced ; that, uncommitted before the eye of the world, she was mentally falling away from the path of moral rectitude, and gradually sinking lower and lower into that abyss of spiritual night, in which nothing but temptation is wanted to constitute each act a crime.

After madly and desperately rushing into a state of bondage, where there was neither affection nor sense of duty to render that bondage endurable, she had first allowed herself to spurn her chains, and then to loath her fellow captive. With such a character, whose will, though often violently thwarted, had never been subdued, the transition from loathing to hatred had been short and sudden, because there was no power to escape ; while the mere

compulsion of the bond was enough of itself to excite resistance to its imposition. . And thus, we repeat, Harriet did cordially hate the man to whom she had bound herself in the most sacred union till death—till death! That was the thought that haunted her, for she was young, and oh! how capable of entering into all the enjoyments of life; while he was sinking into the vale of years, and was gradually becoming more entirely the slave of his bodily appetites.

It happened about this time, that from the rank of alderman, Mr. Maxwell was promoted to that of mayor, and a sumptuous dinner was given to celebrate this great and memorable occasion, and the health of the lady mayoress was drunk by those who believed her to be the happiest of women, and pleasant jokes were passed upon her lord, and copious libations were poured out to the genius of civic glory.

It was a day for Harriet to luxuriate, as she sometimes did (purely for the sake of variety)

in loneliness ; and telling a party of her dear friends, first, that she positively must write letters, and then as they persisted in their kind intrusion, that she was indisposed, she freed herself at last from their affectionate solicitude to wile away the tedious hours of her husband's absence; and sending for a novel whose highly wrought and desperate character was a grand recommendation to its impassioned pages, she drew to the glowing hearth a soft deep chair of crimson damask, placed her small feet upon a splendid ottoman, and sinking down into the posture of repose, began to read.

It was a tale of many horrors—of too many to carry away the feelings from all other things; and ere she opened the last volume, Harriet paused and listened to the deep tone of the church bell, as it struck the hour of twelve. A long train of musing followed—of dangerous thoughts that vacillate between the regions of life and death.

Harriet had long felt like one who, in a

dream, beholds a dark impenetrable horizon closing in on every side. There was, she believed, but one way in which it was possible for her to escape ; and this idea had become so familiar to her secret meditations, as to assume the character of a hope. Thus, when sympathising friends condoled with her upon Mr. Maxwell's apoplectic constitution and habits, a thrill ran through her nerves, for then she detected herself in having wished him dead ; and anxiously as she might anticipate the relief of being left at liberty, there is no bosom so callous as to harbour such a wish towards a familiar companion, still less towards a kind and generous friend, without feeling it to be as base as unnatural—as horrible as base.

But now Harriet was alone—free from the keen watchful eyes of those who would have cried shame upon her thoughts had they been written on her forehead. And therefore she went musing on, and had already decked her brow in widow's weeds, thrown the deep

mourning habit around her graceful person, and wept the becoming tear which the last catastrophe of human life calls forth from all, when the sound of hurrying feet beneath the window caught her ear; a ring, the gentlest that could possibly be heard, soon followed, and then the wheels of a carriage came rumbling from the distance, so slowly that they sounded like a hearse.

Harriet opened the door of the room where she had been sitting. There were strange voices in the hall, and whisperings, and suppressed shrieks amongst the servants, who ran hither and thither, repeating for each other's benefit the word "hush!" so often and so loudly, that it would have roused the most inattentive ear.

To descend and make herself acquainted with the cause of these mysterious sounds, was the first impulse that Harriet felt; but a fit of cold shivering paralyzed her limbs; and though a deep sense of fear and loneliness came over

her, and though, whichever way she looked, the frightful spectacle of a pale and ghastly corpse seemed to be extended, with eyes that glared reproachfully even in death, she had no power to fly from the scene of such imaginary horrors.

At last a stranger's foot was heard ascending the stairs. The first person Harriet recognised was a physician. The next a brother alderman—a boon companion of her husband's.

Their simple story was soon told; Mr. Maxwell was not dead—possibly not in immediate danger; but suffering from the consequences of a decided attack of apoplexy, and requiring the greatest delicacy of treatment and the greatest care.

Though Harriet still trembled violently, she bore this communication with so much apparent self-possession, that the gentlemen were encouraged to propose conducting her to the apartment where her husband had been laid; as, from the behaviour of the domestics, they

had not seen any probability of their being able to take upon themselves the important charge of attending the patient through the night.

At this proposition, however, Harriet involuntarily uttered a faint scream, and shrunk back ; but suddenly recollecting herself, she motioned for the physician to lead the way, and leaning upon the arm of the other gentleman, she proceeded to the distant chamber, which the medical attendants had made choice of on account of its remoteness from the noise of the street.

It is a painful pleasure to contemplate the features of those whom we have loved and served, when illness, divested of suffering, has spread over them the placidity of repose—when death is near, and we gaze, it may be for the last time, upon the still animated form of a friend endeared by long and intimate acquaintance.

But to behold the living witness of our unfaithfulness—the being whom we should

have loved and cherished, but whom our impious wishes would have driven out from the warm shelter of our earthly habitations, and consigned to the cold inhospitable grave—to see such a being stretched out before us, already paralyzed beneath the stroke of death—speechless—helpless—and perhaps without the power of repentance—Oh! it is horrible to think that, though we could not actually draw down the bolt of heaven upon them, we have done what we could!—we have dared to wish them suddenly arrested in their mortal career—cut off from all their purposes, and from all their hopes, and sent out upon the ocean of eternity with all their sins upon their heads!

And now the guilty wife was alone with the being whom she had thus injured—with the man whose generous bounty had surrounded her with all for which she valued life, and whom, in return, she would have deprived of all. She was alone with the man who had

never thought of making up his great account with heaven until it was too late ; and she had the bitter reflection that such was the fate to which she had mentally consigned him. She was alone, for the domestics of her household, like herself, had been accustomed to make pleasure their only pursuit ; and therefore they fled from the presence of the sick or the sorrowful, as they would have shunned the infection of a fatal malady.

The physician had descended to the lower apartments of the house, to sit in consultation upon his patient's hopeless case ; and Harriet, stupified, and almost speechless with horror, had not had the precaution to detain any of her servants ; she was, therefore, alone in the silence of midnight, hearing nothing, but, within the curtains of that fearful couch, the deep laborious breathings of the senseless sufferer, whose every moment of existence threatened to be his last. She was alone beneath the eye of an almighty Father, who had

given her unnumbered blessings, all which she had neglected or abused, who had committed to her keeping a sacred trust, to which she had been unfaithful, and who knew that, in her secret soul, she had cherished dark, deadly wishes, as unnatural towards a fellow-creature, as impious towards a just and holy God.

It was a moment of such strict and awful searching of the polluted heart, that Harriet bowed herself, perhaps for the first time in her life, with real penitence before her Maker; and falling on her knees in utter and hopeless prostration of soul, implored his mercy for herself, and for him whom she had so deeply injured.

As a test of her sincerity, she entreated that his life might yet be spared, and that she might have time to prove, by after faithfulness, how deeply she deplored her past errors—her past crimes. For such they now appeared to her view, all rising up before her

mental vision, arrayed in their native hideousness, and stamped with the indelible characters of guilt.

The free outpouring of the heart through the medium of prayer once opened—the native language of the stricken soul once adopted—the miserable penitent felt as if she could never leave the gates of mercy, or cease from her fervent supplications, until her prayer had been granted, and the solemn compact binding her to a holier life had been fully sealed.

She felt as if it was impossible to part thus, even from one who had possessed no place in her affections, but to whom she owed much, and who had shared with undeviating kindness her daily and familiar walk. If he might but be spared, she now believed it would be possible for her to love him better—at least she would promise to serve him more faithfully. She would remember that she herself was one who had no right to look for perfection in others; and that, in entering into that solemn

union which death alone could dissolve, she had brought with her at least an equal share of imperfections.

All these, with a long train of consequent reflections, passed through the mind of the penitent with the rapidity of lightning, and with something of its vividness; and then came the fearful suspicion, that perhaps she was unworthy to be again tried with the trust she had neglected; that the thread of mental existence was already torn asunder; and that she would be haunted, through the remainder of her days, with the reflection that at the very moment when her secret thoughts were brooding with a fiend-like satisfaction upon her husband's death, her impious wishes were answered from the regions of eternal night, and the angel of destruction was sent forth to shadow, with his fatal wings, the life she had dared to denounce.

While these fearful thoughts were gradually awakening the dormant conscience of the

faithless wife, she still remained upon her knees, for the anguish of her soul found no relief, save in the language of prayer; nor was it until the return of the physician, that other attendants were called into the chamber, and an attempt was made to lead her away.

But, no. She stood as if rooted to the spot, and declared her determination to remain until some more favourable symptoms should appear.

The physician offered his tribute of praise to her devoted attachment, but he shook his head when she spoke of favourable symptoms.

“Is there then no hope?” exclaimed Harriet, clasping her hands in an agony of despair, as if she had loved her husband but too fondly.

The doctor again shook his head. He pronounced nothing decidedly, but Harriet, judging from his looks that all hope was over, felt as if her eternal doom was sealed.

From this moment she held little communication with any one; but placing herself

beside the pillow where her husband lay, sat like a marble statue, watching with such intensity, that those who saw her then, and knew nothing of her former character, believed her to be actuated by the tenderest and most devoted attachment; and false and flattering reports of her conjugal affection were spread abroad, and pitying nurses implored that she would spare herself; and Aunt Hilary came and whispered in her hearing, how she had always been the kindest and most exemplary of wives; and Harriet bore it all, as the criminal at the stake bears the quick searching of the pitiless flames, that may consume his heart, but cannot obliterate his guilt.

These long and painful vigils were in vain, for there dawned no ray of reason which she might at last have endeavoured to direct aright; there came no return of consciousness which she might have welcomed with at least a word of kindness; there was no outstretched hand which she might have clasped in her own, nor

look of recognition which she might have answered with a tear. He was gone for ever, and the mighty debt she owed him was left for the great day of final recompence, unpaid !

On the first information of Mr. Maxwell's sudden and alarming attack, Mary Grey had hastened to her sister without a moment's delay ; and her presence, her kindness, with the assurance of her continued affection, brought the first ray of consolation to the afflicted mourner : for Harriet was indeed a mourner, though not in the way that was understood or suspected by the world. And friends gathered round her with their kind condolences, believing that she wept as a widow ought to weep, while they dwelt upon the praises of the dead, as if that were the balm most soothing to her wounded spirit.

Mary knew from the first moment, when Harriet fell upon her neck and wept, that an important change had been wrought upon her feelings ; but she withheld the searching ques-

tion how or what that change had been. It was sufficient for her that her sister was serious and sincere. Her duty was to assist, to comfort, and to strengthen—the rest was with God; and whether he worked out his benignant purposes by gracious invitations, or by terrific warnings, the *end* was all about which she was solicitous.

It was an additional shock to the feelings of Harriet, to find, on the reading of her husband's will, that such had been his confidence in her, even at the time when she least deserved it, that he had left the whole of his worldly possessions at her disposal, with the exception of a few legacies, the largest of which he had bequeathed to her sister Mary, who, from the time of her being an inmate in his house, had held a high place in his favour.

Harriet felt at first as if she could never call this wealth her own. She seemed to have no right to use it for her individual gratification; and so powerful was this feeling, that through

the whole of her after life, she was more ready than prudence would always warrant, to answer with kindness and liberality whatever claims might be made upon her bounty, regarding herself as a steward, who having once betrayed his trust, is never again entitled either to confidence or reward.

Nor was it difficult for Mary now to prevail upon Harriet to return with her to Welbourne House. All places were alike to her, and Mary with her untiring affection, her cool judgment, and her strict sense of right and wrong, had become almost essential to the support of her sister's better feelings. For Harriet was still volatile, still ardent, and still self-willed, needing the counsel and the guidance of a more stable mind than her own; though the shock her feelings had so recently sustained seemed to have undermined the root of her former pleasures, proving their utter worthlessness by their withering and falling away before her eyes; while, to supply the

perpetual craving of her restless mind, she was compelled to look out for others more durable in their nature and more intrinsic in their worth.

CHAPTER V.

MARY Grey was happy—she was almost more than happy, to observe the change which, in the course of a few months, was wrought in her sister Harriet's habits and mode of thinking. Not that she was likely ever to be a very stable or influential character. She was formed to act from impulse, and the only good to be anticipated, was, that the predominating impulse should be one of a rational and benevolent nature.

Perhaps no one single circumstance afforded greater promise to her faithful guardian than that she was now perfectly sincere. It was, indeed, her nature to be so, but since she had

yielded to the influence of false excitement, there had been so much to conceal, that every thing she said and did were but parts of a series of acting, by which she had succeeded in imposing upon those who saw no farther than the surface of her character.

She was now more simple—more affectionate—more open to reproof; and, though subject to fits of depression, and accustomed to speak in language of the deepest despondency of her own religious condition, she was, upon the whole, a cheerful, and often an interesting companion; for she concealed none of the strange workings of her mind from Mary, who watched over her with a love as intense as it was holy.

One subject alone—the subject of her past life, was shunned by Harriet as scrupulously as the believer in enchantment shuns the fatal and irrevocable word that is to consign him for ever to the magic spell. The most casual allusion to her late husband would arrest the

cheerful words that played upon her lips, and change her fitful smile to a look of such blank and deadly paleness, that those who thus supposed they had too incautiously touched the tenderest cords of feeling, believed her to have been the most exemplary and affectionate of wives. At the sound of her own name, too, when addressed as Mrs. Maxwell, she would often start as if a shivering thrill ran through her trembling nerves ; and Mary, ever studious to avoid giving pain, learned to regard these feelings without inquiring into their cause ; while, with the most delicate and persevering assiduity, she endeavoured to beguile her sister's thoughts from brooding over the sad realities of the past, and to direct them into a train of active usefulness, more likely to be productive of present good and future happiness.

Although Harriet had entertained no idea of finding in Welbourne House more than a temporary refuge, yet, having no ties to any other

place, and an especial horror of returning to her recent home, she was easily led on from day to day to share her sister's habits and pursuits. Indeed, they were associated in so many benevolent duties, enjoyed together so many long walks and rides, and kept up so constant an intercourse with the inmates of the Abbey, where extensive improvements were going on, that Harriet began to suspect it had been partly her own fault, that she had previously found a residence beneath her father's roof so intolerably dull.

There was, however, one important change in her circumstances to which she owed more than she was aware of—she was independent, and could now pursue her own plans without reference to her father, or fear of being thwarted by his authority.

This happy circumstance had also invested her with a kind of dignity in the eyes of that father; and the many serious thoughts which had stamped her countenance with a shade of

gravity, were not without their share in obtaining additional favour in his eyes.

Besides the satisfaction Mary felt in her sister's altered character, and in the assistance and sympathy they mutually imparted to each other, there was a kindness done by Harriet of which she was wholly unconscious, by accompanying her sister in her walks to the village, and in her frequent visits to the Abbey; for, ever since the introduction of one particular subject between Terence and Mary, they had met either in fear or in danger of conversing on forbidden themes. They had lived together for years on terms of such perfect confidence and familiar intimacy, that it was extremely difficult to refrain from touching upon any subject intensely interesting to either party; and as Terence, from the little control he had ever exercised over his words or feelings, was perpetually liable to encroach upon prohibited ground, it had become necessary for Mary to treat him with a reserve as painful as it was

unnatural to both. For they were still so much together, and so frequently under the necessity of walking alone, and conversing confidentially on social and domestic affairs, that this reserve consisted more in Mary's altered looks and tones, than in actually absenting herself from his presence. And he who was so well read in the kindness of the eye and of the voice, missed the familiar expression of both, and laid the fault of the change to the absence of that affection, which had been more essential than he was aware of to the happiness of his life.

In fact, though Terence Malone had been captivated by Ellen's beauty, and beguiled by her youthful charms into the belief that she was the most faultless being upon earth, he was in reality much more dependant upon Mary, than her, for his highest enjoyments, as well as for the support of his best feelings and his noblest resolutions.

He had not yet experienced what it was to live without her ; but he had discovered that

to live alone with Ellen was far less productive of interest and satisfaction, than to have been thus circumstanced with Mary; and often was this conviction on the point of bursting forth from his full heart, in language that must have effectually put an end to the intimacy it was so desirable for him to cherish.

Under such circumstances, the addition of a third party came most opportunely, both for himself and Mary; for, in the presence of Harriet, he had no wish to complain of his wife, or to suffer it to appear that he was less happy than he had boasted that he should be. In company with her sister, Mary would also pursue her walks to Welbourne in peace and comfort, and, free from the apprehension of touching some dangerous cord of feeling, could converse with confidence and safety.

Indeed, such was the satisfaction she was reaping from the performance of her various duties, that to her the sun never rose too early, or set too late; nor ever did the day return,

without bringing enjoyment enough to counterbalance all its cares.

Yet we have sufficient authority for believing that the pilgrimage of the zealous Christian is seldom one of uninterrupted peace; and it was about this time that Mary Grey perceived in her father's looks and habits an important change, awakening many anxious fears.

He had always been reserved and taciturn in his own family; but he was now unsettled in his manner, absent, and evidently ill at ease. He made no complaint, nor alluded, directly or indirectly, to himself or his affairs; but he remained later and later at the parlour fire when other members of the household had retired to rest; and might often be heard pacing to and fro in the silence of midnight, with the regular and monotonous tread of one who endeavours by the exertion of the body, to wear down the sense of mental suffering.

Still the cause of his increasing anxiety was a perfect mystery to Mary. That her father

was a man of ample pecuniary means she had never entertained a doubt. His liberal contribution to all public institutions marked him out as independent, if not actually wealthy. He had, besides, lately involved himself deeply in the labyrinths of the law, with his son James for his able adviser; and as the disputed point was one of comparatively little importance, Mary thought, in her womanly wisdom, that he would never have done this without resources too plentiful to be readily exhausted.

She did not know that it was a part of the principle on which her father acted, to leave his children under the advantageous necessity of providing for themselves. She did not know that he was prompted by his pride, to stand forward before the world as a man of influence and competency, who could at his own pleasure throw an important weight into the scale of public benefit: and still less did she know the inexpressible satisfaction which

the assumption of a long disputed right, however insignificant in itself, affords to him who would sacrifice every comfort of his life to maintain his own dignity, and establish his will as law.

What, then, Mary questioned within herself, could be the cause of her father's anxiety. He was a man within whose bosom counsels no human being had ever been admitted, and it was scarcely to be expected that he should divulge them now; yet his countenance, cold and inexpressive as it was, wore traces of inward pain, which Mary grieved to see, and his tall figure was beginning to bend, less with the weight of years than of sorrow.

It happened one evening, when the two sisters were returning from a visit to Herbert Lee, whose declining health rendered their attentions both welcome and necessary, that they observed their father in company with a strange man, alighting at his own door.

They entered, expecting to be introduced to

a visitor, but the stranger was already closeted with Stephen Grey in his own private room, where both remained till midnight.

Neither Mary nor Harriet could collect their vague surmises into any definite form on this unprecedented occasion ; nor were they less disturbed, when, on meeting at the breakfast table on the following morning, they found that their father had already set off to town with his unknown guest.

Another day of suspense and apprehension succeeded, and still their father's looks and conduct wore the same mysterious aspect.

On the morning of the third, he took his usual place at the breakfast table. His appetite had so failed of late, that to him a meal was a mere ceremony, and apparently an irksome one, for he dismissed it as soon as possible ; and though he had generally risen immediately after the cloth was removed, and retired to his own study, he now desired his daughters to keep their seats ; when, pressing

his hand violently upon his forehead, he attempted twice to speak, without being able to render his words intelligible.

At last he said, in something like his wonted manner, " You have probably perceived (though indeed it is not much that women do perceive) that my affairs of late have not been conducted with the satisfaction I could have wished; and I have now the painful duty of informing you, that an important change has taken place in my circumstances.

"The man Gibbins, in whom I trusted, has absconded, and the firm of Grey and Gibbins is insolvent!"

This sentence was uttered with a convulsive effort, whose violence seemed to threaten the severing of the bonds of mortal suffering; for with that single word, *insolvent*, had vanished all the foundation of the mighty structure of Stephen Grey's indomitable pride.

Yes, pride! for, with all his self-denial, and austerity of life, and profession of hu-

mility, Stephen Grey had been proud of his good name—of his standing in the world—of his influence—of his unsullied character—and of his ability to do just and generous deeds, before the eyes of men. But, above all, he had been proud of his integrity; and never since the word insolvency found its present use and application in society, had the full force of its meaning fallen with more deadly and oppressive weight, than on the stricken soul of Stephen Grey.

Mary and her sister both looked aghast at the intelligence their father had communicated with so much difficulty, and so much pain, that of all the compulsory acts of his life (and they were many) perhaps none had cost him a greater effort than the present. For, before his children—the triflers, and the reprobates, amongst whom he had striven from their earliest years to stifle the spirit of rebellion, by the influence of his individual infallibility—to own before them, that he had fallen from

his high estate, that he was but constituted like other men, without more forethought, more prudence, or more uprightness. This was, indeed, to humble himself in the very dust; and, leaning back in his chair, he covered his face with both his hands, and groaned, as if struggling with a mortal agony.

It is unnecessary again to repeat, that Stephen Grey knew nothing of human nature, nothing of the peculiar traits of character, or of the distinctive shades of feeling, in those with whom he daily associated; and while he firmly believed, that, on looking up, he should meet the contemptuous glances, and, perhaps, the bitter reproaches of the children, whom he now saw clearly he had injured by his public and somewhat ostentatious liberality, they were weeping by his side, tears of such earnest and compassionate sympathy, that all attempt to give utterance to their sorrow in the common language of condolence, would have been without effect.

“Father!” said Harriet, who was the first to speak, “I now know the real value of the wealth that has been left at my disposal. Take it, I beseech you;” and she knelt down at her father’s feet. “Take it, and use it as your own. It does but weigh upon my conscience. Take it, I implore you; it may enable you to render to every man his own!”

Was it a dream that flitted before the eyes of Stephen Grey? Was it one of those ebullitions of romantic enthusiasm he had ever held in such abhorrence? or, did he, in reality, behold the child he had so often and so unfeelingly repelled, offering him the whole of her worldly substance, and thus enabling him, by an act of unprecedented liberality, to hold up his head again amongst mankind?

It was a moment of such temptation, of such tenderness, and of such overpowering emotion, that he had well nigh folded his arms around his daughter’s neck, and thrown himself, like a child, upon her noble gene-

rosity ; but the conviction, that, by so doing, he should only be repairing his blemished character at the expense of one whom he had no right to injure, roused him from his temporary weakness, and bidding his daughter rise, he took her hand, and said kindly, “ My child ! my dear children ! ” for he extended his other hand to Mary, while a tear, the first they had ever seen there, stood for one moment in his eye, and then rolled down his haggard cheek.

“ My dear children, it is not the loss of wealth that grieves me. You will bear witness for me, that I have never valued the indulgences of life. It is, that I am unable to render unto every man his own ; that, in some instances, the property of those, who will now be utterly destitute, has been committed to my care, under the idea that I was a man of substance and integrity ; and, if I should be tempted to take from the widow to supply the orphan, the stain would be upon my con-

science still, though I might possibly appear more just before the world.

“No, no, Harriet. Press me no farther, I have ill deserved this kindness from you.”

And he laid his hand upon her shining hair, and regarded her with a look of tenderness—a look that should have welcomed her to his bosom in her early years—a look that came too late, though it was grateful to her spirit even yet.

Although the most strenuous endeavours were made by Terence and Harriet, and even by Mary, who cheerfully offered her mite, to spare the character and the feelings of Stephen Grey, by advancing the sum necessary to release him from his present difficulties; he refused firmly, but mildly, to take advantage of their liberality, preferring, as he said, to share the common lot, to endure the obloquy that was his rightful portion, and if he had acted imprudently, or from improper motives, not to increase his self-condemnation by also acting meanly.

It was with this determination, that he re-

signed himself to have his affairs submitted to his creditors, to have his once honourable name added to the public list of bankrupts, and to hear it whispered about amongst those who had formerly kept respectful silence before him, that Stephen Grey would only be able to pay a dividend of fifteen shillings in the pound.

Beyond this, he was insensible to all indignity—incapable of all suffering ; and when his mansion of Welbourne House, with the land adjoining, were advertised for sale, and he prepared himself for a full surrender of all he had ever called his own, even to his family bible and his watch, it was with a feeling of satisfaction in having kept nothing back, however insignificant to others—however important to himself.

But notwithstanding the inflexible determination with which he pursued this line of unflinching integrity, and the external equanimity with which he sustained every fresh demand upon his fortitude, the inner workings of his mind were such as his enfeebled constitution was ill calculated to bear ; and his children,

watching him with anxious solicitude, discovered that the vigour of his frame was giving way, that he slept little—ate without appetite—and that his tall and once athletic figure was shrinking beneath the burden of accumulated cares. Perhaps we should rather say griefs than cares, for his family were all provided for ; and as for himself, now that he considered his good name to be gone, he would have preferred the humblest dwelling, and the coarsest fare, earned by the labour of his own hands, to the most luxurious repose, or even to the common indulgences of respectable old age.

But his children who had the ability to rescue him from such degradation, were not backward in devising the means ; and though he, from whom the most had been expected, deferred the time for offering the support of his kind countenance from week to week, and then from month to month, there were others both ready and willing to devote the whole of their worldly substance to the service of their afflicted father.

By the purchase of Welbourne House, Harriet had obtained the power of reinstating Stephen Grey in his accustomed home ; and, what is of great importance to the comfort of old age, of surrounding him with the familiar objects to which he had become habitually attached. While, in conjunction with Terence Malone, she investigated such cases as involved the greatest individual suffering occasioned by her father's failure, and relieved them to the utmost of her power.

“ Who would have thought of seeing me the mistress of Welbourne House ?” she would sometimes say to Mary : “ free to come and go, to interrupt its silence, and penetrate its secrets, without terror, and without deceit ?”

She would then talk playfully of assuming in her own person a right to exercise the *iron rule* ; when, suddenly, some unbidden recollection of the dark and gloomy past would cast a shadow over her once animated face, and the sentence she had threatened to impose, would

die away upon her own lips. For it is not all at once, that the degraded soul can recover its upright walk before the eyes of an all-seeing God ; and even where the mercy of Heaven has been extended in full pardon to the penitent, he will be haunted with the visions of the yawning gulf, upon whose brink he first awoke to spiritual life, mingled with the memory of offences of a more temporal and human nature, that can never be redeemed—of kindness unrequited—of affection wounded—of confidence betrayed, with that general abuse of the means of happiness, for which we feel accountable, not only to our heavenly Father, but to our nearest and dearest connexions ; and, perhaps, more agonizing than all, to the friends we can never meet again !

In seasons of affliction, there are sometimes inner wounds, rankling in the heart with a degree of poignancy which takes away something from the full force of the one overwhelming calamity. And thus it was with Stephen

Grey, though no human ear was witness to the slightest murmur of complaint; nor would it have been known, except by accident, that he had suffered in his affections, as well as in his pride.

On the eventful morning when he was confounded with the intelligence that Mr. Gibbins had absconded; his first impulse had been to write to his son James, whose able judgment, and dutiful regard, were all the afflicted parent then relied on, in the way of human aid. That he would fly to him on the instant, he never for one moment doubted; and, surrounded with perplexities of every description, it was some consolation to count the lessening hours that must necessarily be occupied in travelling from his son's residence to his own.

Supported by the full confidence of beholding this beloved son, he placed himself in a public situation to meet the coach, though he knew that half the loiterers there were talking of the failure of Grey and Gibbins. He

watched the passengers one after another step from the vehicle, but James was not there; and sick at heart, he returned to his home, convinced at the same time that his letter had never been received; that his son had been from home; or, in short, that anything, however improbable, had transpired, rather than that James should have treated his father with unkindness or neglect.

The next mail brought no tidings, and the next brought nothing but a letter. It was with a blank disappointed look that he broke the seal, and read over twice—nay, three times did he read the smooth contents of those well-penned pages, and then quietly folding them up, he rode home.

On that evening a deeper gloom than usual darkened on his brow. He was so absent and restless, that taking several papers from his pocket, amongst which was this letter, he turned them over—read it again; and then, after throwing them upon the table in a pro-

miscuous heap, walked to the window, where he leaned with his head upon his hand for some time, apparently looking out upon the lawn, though all was still and silent, and the misty hues of twilight, already stealing over hill and valley, rendered the distant objects imperceptible, and the more immediate indistinct.

While he remained in this musing attitude, Mary and Harriet entered the room; when, as if shrinking from the scrutiny of their observant eyes, or possibly indulging in some reverie which their presence interrupted, he turned away, and left them to their vague yet painful apprehensions as to the cause of his increased depression.

Like all who suffer from the secret smart of wounded feeling, he found relief in wandering alone through the fields, while the fresh, free breeze blew past him, and the moon and the stars shone as sweetly over his path, as if it neither knew the impress of erring feet, or the stain of human tears.

While he wandered on with no other purpose but to lull the anguish of his own heart, his daughters sat in sad and earnest consultation upon his circumstances, and his sufferings. The papers he had left behind him, still lay strewed upon the table. Amongst them was the open letter from his son, whose signature caught the quick eye of Harriet.

It was so unprecedented a thing for Stephen Grey to leave any but the most trifling and unimportant papers open to the inspection of female eyes, that Harriet, less delicate than her sister as to the means she made use of to satisfy her curiosity, or calm her anxious fears, seized upon the letter, declaring her conviction, that under such circumstances they had a right to know what it contained; and while Mary argued and remonstrated, even against the force of her own inclinations, her sister resolutely began to read. The contents of the letter were as follows:—

“ DEAREST FATHER,

“ Imagine to yourself all that the most affectionate and devoted son ought to feel for the best of parents, and you will be able in some measure to conceive the effect produced upon my mind by your distressing letter. My first impulse was of course to fly to Welbourne, but my inability to render you the least pecuniary assistance, in the present critical juncture, deterred me from proceeding as my inclinations pointed out. While I live, you may depend upon my deepest sympathy, and that I am with you in heart and mind under all your trials ; but these casualties occurring where there has previously been not the slightest reason to expect them, unavoidably weakens public confidence, and renders it necessary for me to look well to my own foundation in the world, that I may be better able to assist those who have hitherto depended upon your protection and support. It is there-

fore of the highest importance to my credit, that I should not only be, but *appear* to be, wholly unconnected with you in pecuniary affairs; and for this reason I am reduced to the painful necessity of denying myself the melancholy pleasure of personally mingling my griefs with yours.

“For the reasons above stated, I should take it as a great favour if you would abstain, for a few weeks, from making any farther application to me, as my clerks are at any time liable to become acquainted with the contents of my letters.”

“Smooth and false!” exclaimed Harriet.

“And cold as Lapland’s snows!” echoed Mary, who, after protesting against hearing the letter, had been surprised into attention, by the nature of its contents.

“This brother of ours is a hypocrite after all,” said Harriet.

“I fear he is,” responded her sister. “And

only think ! when my poor father had written to him, and told him all, and perhaps requested him to come !”

“ It is too heartless for nature !” exclaimed Harriet, with heightened indignation. “ He is no brother of mine, and never shall be ! I disown him like a degenerate scion of the family tree ; for whatever our faults may be, he is the first hypocrite amongst us, and may he prove the last !”

“ I always suspected,” said Mary, with more composure, “ that my brother James was not sincere, and though his fault is the very last I should regard with patience or charity, I still think that even for him there is some excuse in the unfortunate and ill-judged system under which we have been educated.”

“ No, Mary,” replied Harriet, with warmth. “ For the gross depravity of poor George, I can find some excuse in my father’s severity, which taught him how to suffer, but not how to enjoy. The misfortunes, and perhaps some

venial errors of our lost Allan, I can charge to the same account : even for myself, I would gladly find some palliation in the circumstance of my never having been taught the real beauty, the lasting happiness, and the intrinsic virtue of a moral and religious life. But for a hypocrite, Mary, there is no excuse,—there can be none !”

“ The sin of hypocrisy,” observed Mary, “ is so repulsive to all noble minds, that few will take the trouble to examine the root of the evil, or mingle with their condemnation of it, those palliatives to which every sinner is entitled in the judgment of creatures fallible as himself. Yet how many gentle spirits, having once erred, are driven to falsehood and deceit from very terror of the harsh, vindictive laws under which they exist ; when, had love been implanted as the foundation of obedience, they would not only have acted more consistently with what is right, but in all their trifling deviations they would have dared to tell the truth.

“It is under a system of terror that the weak become artful, and the gentle mean; let us, then, before we spurn even the hypocrite, whom I grant to be the lowest in the scale of human beings, look back to his infancy, and see by what frightful apprehensions his cradle was surrounded. Let us reflect, too, how alluring, on one hand, is the voice of kindness, how cheering the look of approbation; on the other, how appalling the frown, how tremendous the wrath of those who hold the total sum of our happiness and misery in their keeping; and say, whether to a little helpless child, the temptation is not great—great almost beyond the power of childish resolution, to shrink from the awful consequences of venial delinquency, when a single falsehood, perhaps an evasion, and sometimes even an artfully regulated look, would be sufficient for the purpose of eluding detection.

“I speak not in favour of the vice of hypocrisy. It is odious before God and man. But from what I have seen in my father’s family, and

from what I know of the operations of the human mind, I believe it to be the natural, if not the necessary consequence of the continued and systematic exercise of the *iron rule*."

CHAPTER VI.

THE name of Elliott Lee has been so often introduced to the notice of the reader, and the progress of his life is of such importance to the moral which these pages have been intended to convey, that it may not be out of place, even in this part of the story, to recur to the early stage of his life, and to trace his present alienation from his family to its original cause.

The reader will perhaps be disappointed to learn, that we have no dark mystery to reveal—no romantic or extraordinary events to detail—no cruel destiny to blame, for hurrying him downward in a career of vice, and consigning him to its inevitable consequences.

It is our business simply to describe the moral process by which the affections become weaned from their natural and legitimate objects, the taste perverted, and the foundation of all lasting or substantial happiness uprooted ; and for this purpose it is not necessary to pursue vice to its extreme, to follow the lawless desperado to his midnight haunts, or to record the confessions of the murderer on the scaffold.

The sphere of domestic life—that sphere beyond which the writer has no wish to depart—affords examples sufficient both in number and variety to show the dissatisfaction, the melancholy, the languor, and the weariness of a useless life; the burden of talents unemployed; the anguish of a mind that preys upon itself; and the fruitless wandering of an immortal spirit, while it seeks its happiness and its home on earth.

Early in life Elliott Lee had evinced a degree of fastidiousness in the choice of his pleasures, which, while it indicated a refinement of taste

calculated to give an elevated tone to his character and pursuits, was extremely difficult to accommodate to ordinary duties, or to subject to any practical system of domestic discipline.

“ We may make this child intelligent, and perhaps interesting,” was the frequent remark of his mother, as she watched him with the solicitude known only to a parent, “ but we can never make him happy.”

Her husband, however, who knew, perhaps better than she did, the full value of domestic comfort, from which he was in great measure excluded, would argue that, perhaps, like himself, the boy would never learn to estimate his blessings, until he had felt the want of them; and that the time would come when he would see the virtue of making the most of such pleasures as he could enjoy, instead of pining perpetually for those beyond his reach.

And as the mind of the youth expanded, he did find his enjoyments; but they were chiefly

of a high and intellectual character, or such as were of extremely difficult attainment. It was consequently impossible that they should be of frequent recurrence in his daily walk, and the intermediate time was lamentably wasted in bewailing their loss, or in depreciating the comparative value of all others.

It may be asked, whence came this querulousness of temper, under the watchful eye of such a mother as Mrs. Lee? And it is sufficient for the writer of these pages to answer, without entering farther into the philosophy of the human mind, that no maternal care has ever yet produced a child without a fault; that characters essentially different will grow up in the same house, surrounded by the same circumstances, and under the discipline of the same mother; and that causes beyond the observation of man will operate in giving to the temper and the feelings, a bias which it requires the study of a whole life to counteract.

Whether, therefore, any peculiar tempera-

ment of mind arises solely out of bodily conformation, or out of impressions received at that early and mysterious stage of human existence, whose secrets never yet have been revealed to mortal sight; or whether such peculiarities are regarded as parts and portions of the great plan of creation, by which all moral agents are destined to have their distinct share of evil to contend with, is of no sort of consequence to the subject of immediate consideration.

It is enough that Elliott Lee was difficult to please, and that his mother, one of the most clear-sighted and conscientious of women, strove by every practicable and lawful means to efface this leading and conspicuous feature from his character.

We have already recorded the apparently trifling circumstances which gave him a disgust to the superficial discipline of public schools; at a time of life when he was too young to reflect, that a mass of human beings cannot be made amenable to the same laws, without cer-

tain individuals, peculiarly constituted, suffering from what appears to them in the light of glaring injustice, and which is not unfrequently calculated to produce the worst possible effect upon their dispositions.

That this fact should never have been thought of sufficient importance to operate with parents against sending their children to large public schools, in cases where it is not absolutely necessary, is one of the most astonishing phenomena of the present day. But, equally astonishing, and far more repulsive is the reflection, that there are fathers, nay, even mothers, who actually *prefer* the absence of their children from their own inspection during the time when they are most capable of receiving durable impressions; when, from the pliability of their feelings, affection has almost as much to do as information in the great work of education; and, consequently, when the real foundation of moral character is permanently laid.

Where one or both of the parents are necessarily removed from the domestic circle; where the mother has been chosen, merely for her wealth, her beauty, or her feminine helplessness (a quality highly esteemed in young and lovely women); or where the example of the father is likely to prove injurious in its influence, great public schools may prove a resource of inestimable value. Yet, even in such cases, it may be questioned, whether the benefit of schools would not be doubled by their being divided into smaller establishments.

Leaving the settlement of this important point, to the time when the march of intellect shall have so far stimulated the just and generous feelings of mankind, that a higher salary, and a more honourable station shall be awarded to those who engage in the arduous and responsible duty of educating youth; we return to our story, observing that Mrs. Lee, in the case of her oldest son, looked upon herself as an

exception to that excellent rule, founded upon the principle of parents retaining the moral instruction of their children in their own hands; because, from the peculiar temperament of her wayward boy, and the unbounded influence he exercised over her other children, she believed, not only that a public school would be the situation most calculated for the correction of his peculiar faults, but that his absence would leave her more at liberty to fulfil, without interruption, her duties to the rest of her family.

This plan, however, was not adopted at a very early age, nor until she had every reason to believe, that the impressions he had received from her hand were such as no after events would be able entirely to efface.

Whether Mrs. Lee acted wisely or unwisely, she certainly acted to the best of her judgment, though the succeeding circumstances of Elliott's life led her not unfrequently to question whether her judgment had been cor-

rect. She was not, however, one of those weak, irresolute beings, who are perpetually repenting of what is in reality no fault of theirs, and reproaching themselves for what is chargeable to their short-sightedness, as mortals; not to their perverseness, as agents of evil. She had, after long trial, mature deliberation, and fervent prayer, acted as she believed for the best; and as far as regarded herself, she was satisfied, because she knew that the heavenly Father, whose glory she was seeking to promote, required no more.

Still, as a mother, she felt deeply; and when dark sayings went abroad that her son was the most refractory and ungovernable member of every institution in which he was placed; and when she began herself to suspect that his affections were alienated from his home, and from all she had ever been solicitous to recommend to him as the proper objects of his preference and regard, it was then that her spirit fainted within her, and she felt as if

she would willingly surrender all she had ever valued in this world, if, by such sacrifice, she might but reclaim her wandering child.

We have before stated what was the principle upon which Mrs. Lee acted, under this, the severest trial of her life; that she yielded not to the womanly impulse of forcing herself without a welcome into the presence of her son, but that she lost no opportunity of assuring him that the way for him to return was open, and would be to the end of her life.

It would not have been consistent with the good taste and guarded education of Elliott Lee, had he plunged at once into gross and degrading habits. Gradually learning rather to loathe the paths of virtue, than to love those of vice, his early deviations commenced under the specious pretext of independence; for he hated to be subject to the influence of laws instituted for the good of a community; he spurned the dominion of those whose cha-

racters were not as unimpeachable as his mother's; and, from his very soul, he despised all artifice, injustice, and oppression; while, quick to discern the lurking evil he abhorred, his fiery passions rose against it with indignant fury, and he committed acts of rebellion and misrule, for which none but his mother could have wrung from him one word of penitence.

As he advanced in his wilful and reckless career, these repeated acts accumulated to such a sum of culpability, as finally affixed to his character a stigma, under which he shrunk from meeting his mother's mild reproving eye.

He felt, too, that by association with the world he was losing his relish for simple pleasures, and that if he returned home, it must be to wound his mother's feelings by his want of interest in every thing around him.

Had the alteration in his character, been merely such as arose out of the consciousness of having committed certain deliberate and determined violations of moral duty, he could

have returned to his sorrowing parent, made confession of his guilt, received her pardon, and been at peace ; but his errors were those of the heart, cherished, nurtured, and persisted in ; and it would have been a mockery to make confession of what he was neither prepared to condemn, nor to resign.

The system of perfect confidence so strictly maintained by Mrs. Lee in the midst of her own family, was, in his opinion, a sufficient obstacle to his returning home ; for to deceive his mother was a crime to which he was far from being so degraded as to stoop, and to tell her that he no longer loved to walk in the christian path, whose beauty and whose excellence it had been her chief study to teach him to admire, was to him equally impossible.

Thus he gave the reins to his inclination, and rushed forth alone upon the untried wilderness of life, searching with an avidity peculiar to his nature, through all the tempting paths of evil, for an ideal beauty and excellence

to supply the craving of his soul, after it had rejected the substantial and the real.

While undecided how to dispose of himself at the midsummer recess, Elliott Lee received a pressing invitation from Lord Dacre to accompany his son, with whom he had formed an intimacy, to his father's seat in one of the midland counties, and afterwards to join him and a party of his friends in a tour to the north of England.

It was not long after this, that Elliott entered upon his college life, where the same fastidiousness, the same haughty temper, and the same susceptibility of feeling, marked him as an interesting, but somewhat moody companion ; though such was his extreme generosity, his noble disdain of all artifice or meanness, and the perfect indifference with which he regarded every thing connected with his own interest, that the few who were admitted to his intimacy, attached themselves to him with no common degree of regard.

Amongst these was the oldest son of Lord Dacre, a young man of high intellectual endowments, who was in the habit of speaking of his aunt, Lady Nugent, in terms of the most unqualified admiration.

Whether from the spirit of contradiction, or because he was wearied with the praises of a lady whom he knew to be neither young, nor free from the heinous and unpardonable vice of learning, Elliott accustomed himself to pour in an opposing torrent of abuse, until at last he conceived a perfect hatred for the name of Nugent; and when her ladyship's degenerate son appeared at college, with his juvenile assurance ever ready to supply the want of good feeling and good sense, he was marked out by our hero as the especial object of his contempt.

It was a propensity so powerful with Elliott Lee, as almost to amount to a principle of action, to dislike every one whom he heard warmly and indiscriminately praised, and above

all other objects of abhorrence, to dislike women of great pretensions.

He was himself so highly intellectual, so talented, and so quick to learn, that he despised the distinction of being learned, as one of too easy attainment to merit the applause it generally meets with from the world; and he regarded a noble heart as being so much more rare, as well as so much more important in society, that even amongst men he was accustomed to give it the preference; and when he heard of a woman neglecting her feminine duties for the sake of literary honours, he compared her with his mother, and despised her from his very soul.

A female author he consequently looked upon as a monster in creation—an excrescence upon society; and whenever a new novel or a new poem issued from the press, under the illustrious name of Lady Nugent, and her nephew spoke in triumph of the flattering welcome, and the unbounded popularity with

which it had been received, he looked with as much disgust upon the picture his imagination had created of this lady, as if he had discovered, within her blue stocking, a cloven foot.

Disappointed in the interest he was constantly endeavouring to excite, young Dacre determined to await the event of an interview between the parties, which he expected to take place at his father's house, and which he never doubted would accomplish a complete victory over the prejudices of his friend.

Here, however, he had calculated too much upon the power of the enchantress. Elliott Lee was introduced to Lady Nugent, and vacated the seat of honour by her side, the first moment that he could with any propriety escape.

"You must allow that she is handsome," said Dacre to his friend, as soon as they were alone together.

"I allow," replied Elliott, "that she affects the sibyl style of beauty, and that she succeeds to admiration."

“Lady Nugent affects nothing,” said Dacre, indignantly. “What she *is*, exceeds a thousand fold what she appears to be!”

“Then she must be very old,” observed Elliott, coolly.

“Wait till you are acquainted with her, my dear fellow,” said his friend, with a smile, “and then you will not think of her age.”

“When I see Frank Nugent,” replied Elliott, “and reflect that he is her son, I shall always think her life, whatever its duration may be, has been sorrowfully misspent.”

Dacre shook his head. “Is it fair,” said he, “that all mothers should be judged of by their sons?” And Elliott, who deeply felt this unintentional reproof, was silent.

Although still too much prejudiced against the lady authoress to permit him to make one of her exclusive circle of privileged friends, Elliott became interested in contemplating from a distance the immense varieties of character which this fascinating woman could assume, without sacrificing her own identity;

and in listening to her conversation, which, though too brilliant for his taste, was still natural and easy.

It seemed as if the presence of Lady Nugent gave a charm to every thing around her; and while she herself wore no appearance of display, she possessed the happy art of drawing other people out, in such perfection, that instead of being abashed by her superiority, they were apt in her society to believe themselves more talented, and more accomplished, than they really were.

Struck with the remarkably handsome face and form of Elliott Lee, and by no means backward to perceive his decided aversion to her society, it became a point of greater importance to her than the thing itself was worth, to cultivate an intimacy with him, and to *compel* him to admire her.

Why a woman who could command the admiration of the world should feel piqued at the indifference of a mere youth, is a paradox

we are not prepared to explain ; but certain it is, that to find in the midst of a partial and flattering circle, one individual, who without any personal injury to resent, does not, and cannot like us, has a great tendency to counteract the self-esteem which general admiration might otherwise produce, and often recalls the bewildered mind to a clear, but unwelcome perception of its own deficiencies.

What was Elliott Lee to Lady Nugent—what had he a right to be, circumstanced as they both were? He was in fact no more than Mordecai sitting at the king's gate to the jealous favourite, who deemed his triumph incomplete so long as one human being, though even the most insignificant upon earth, refused to acknowledge his supremacy.

With all her love of distinction, and all the sacrifices she had made to obtain it, Lady Nugent had in reality more heart than the world gave her credit for; and often while she sat like a throned queen in the midst of her

adoring subjects, she was bitterly feeling the emptiness and the worthlessness of all her envied honours. Often, too, she would escape from her central position in society, and, concealing herself so as to escape observation or pursuit, would indulge herself with a long and solitary ramble, either for the purpose of courting the charmed sisters who are said to fly from the haunts of artificial life, or to muse upon all she had attained in her elevated and successful career—it might be upon all she had lost.

It happened one evening, that she and Elliott Lee confronted each other on a high green terrace that commanded a splendid view of the setting sun; and the gentleman would have bowed and passed on, but that Lady Nugent, absorbed in her own poetical ideas, forgetting for a moment, or affecting to forget that she addressed herself to one who professed to have no sympathy with her thoughts, began in her enthusiastic manner, to expatiate upon the glories of the scene now smiling around her.

She had spoken for some time, (for like most women of ardent feelings, she was extremely voluble when highly excited,) but receiving no response from her companion, she turned upon him her deep dark eyes, whose expression was always full of meaning.

“ I forgot,” said she, “ that I was addressing myself to one who has no soul for these things. I forgot, too,” and her voice fell as she added, “ that I was occupying the time upon which I have no right to intrude.”

Elliott answered by some common-place civility; but Lady Nugent, who would rather have heard the genuine truth, however severe upon herself, replied, “ No, no, Mr. Lee, *you* must not sacrifice your conscience to be civil. All the world can do that. By you, I have thus far been treated with sincerity, and I assure you I am not unacquainted with the sentiments you entertain for me.”

“ Madam,” said Elliott, with great gravity, “ the woman I have hitherto best known, and best loved, is one whose character, with the

exception of her mental endowments, and the charms of her conversation, is in direct opposition to yours. Pardon me, therefore, if in adoring my mother, I have imbibed something like prejudice against those who are the most unlike her."

Lady Nugent extended her hand; she could scarcely speak, for tears were in those splendid eyes, whose light was wont to fall upon her admiring votaries like the beams of the rising sun upon the prostrate worshippers of the god of day.

"I can not only pardon, but love you," said she, "for this noble tribute to a mother's excellence. Would to Heaven that all sons were like you!"

Elliott started back. "Like me!" he exclaimed. "Alas! I am breaking my poor mother's heart!"

"Impossible!" said Lady Nugent, "when you love her so devotedly."

"I love her," replied Elliott, "Oh! how

sincerely! but I no longer love what she does, not even the virtues she has recommended to my choice; and never will I meet her eye, until I can meet it either with an altered character, or a repentant heart."

They were both silent, and walked some paces on the terrace ere Elliott spoke again.

"Can you tell me," he then said, "you who are so deeply read in all the mysteries of our being,—can you tell me how it is possible to escape from my own reflections?"

"And can you, who are so young," said Lady Nugent, "have so much to escape from?"

"I have the sin of ingratitude at least," replied Elliott. "How much more, is of no consequence to any one but myself."

"You have asked me a question," said Lady Nugent, "which, if we lived in the days of oracular intelligence, would be the first I should propose for my own benefit."

"I may ask in my turn," replied Elliott,

“ is it possible that you, who command all that the world holds dear, can have any thing to fly from ? ”

“ Yes,” said his companion in a deep and mournful voice, “ I have my own heart. And when I look abroad on such a scene as this, and see that every thing in creation has its value and its use, and ask for what purpose I am living; that heart with its affections wasted, and half its faculties abused, becomes a source of such intolerable torment, that I rush into the smiling circle, where the mock incense of idolatry beguiles my feelings of their anguish—my conscience of its power to reprove.”

Elliott offered his arm to Lady Nugent, to conduct her back to this circle; yet, ere they left the terrace, or turned away from the glowing west, he paused again to give utterance to his excited feelings—excited, for one brief and happy moment, with the high hope of yet redeeming the past.

“ I did not presume to think,” said he,

“that Lady Nugent and I had one sentiment in common. But since we have shared together the bitterest of all human reflections, the reflection that our lives have been spent in vain, that we have wandered in search of happiness where no happiness was to be found, shall we not share together the noble resolution to return?”

“To return—to what?” said his companion, and an expression of agony, almost like a convulsion, passed over her fine features. “You, who are so young, may return to the natural and innocent pleasures of rational existence—you, who have the best of mothers, may return to her love—you, who have the world before you, may return to the choice of what will make that world a place of rest; but to what should I return?”

Lady Nugent said this in such low, deep tones of sorrow, and tears of such touching sadness followed, that Elliott Lee, who had before unconsciously admired, now pitied her

from his very soul, and, out of this pity, mingled with admiration, sprung an attachment, that kept him within the sphere of her attractions through many after years.

From his childhood, Elliott Lee had been used to feel and estimate the value of feminine candour, when allied to all that is sterling in principle, and pure in sentiment; and now he was by no means insensible to its charm, when it laid before him the compunctious visitings of a heart as weak and erring as his own. This was a confidence which he was far too generous to abuse; and Lady Nugent accustomed, on one hand, to the flattery of those who would not acknowledge that they saw her faults, and, on the other, to the treachery of those who betrayed them, dwelt with no light or ordinary satisfaction upon the circumstance of having found one real friend. And, perhaps, if the secrets of her womanly feelings were laid bare, of having found him adorned with every charm

that youth, and beauty, and fascinating manners, and high mental endowments can impart.

At the time when this acquaintance was first formed, Lady Nugent was contemplating a tour on the continent, expressly for the benefit of her son, and the younger Dacre. She knew, however, that her society and habits would be as uncongenial to their tastes, as theirs would be to hers; and when she appealed imploringly to Elliott, who had just come into possession of his ample fortune, he felt neither the wish nor the power to decline making one of the party.

If to be surrounded by all that is most calculated to gratify our natural tastes and preconceived desires, could of itself, without reference to any sort of moral responsibility, confer happiness, Elliott Lee would, during the time he spent abroad, have been the most enviable of men; for Lady Nugent had travelled much, with the eye of a painter and a

poet, with taste to appreciate the beautiful, wherever it might be found, with a memory to note down the interesting associations belonging to every scene, and with powers of conversation, heightened by a vivid imagination, capable of investing every thing she dwelt upon with an additional beauty of her own creating.

Catherine Lee was more correct than she herself was aware of, when she spoke of her brother as being spell-bound by the enchantress. For he found in her untiring companionship, and in the society her fascinations drew around her, so much in accordance even with his fastidious feelings, that, though he could not boast of happiness, he escaped disgust, and felt less wearied, for a time at least, than by the dull routine of ordinary life.

It is true, his mother's character sometimes rose upon his memory, adorned with virtues, whose genuine worth so far surpassed

that of the beings who met him even here, that he felt occasional misgivings, as to whether the happiness he was still in search of might not in reality be left behind; but the contempt with which he looked back upon the simple pleasures of his early home, and the low estimate they were held in by the world in which he now moved, impelled him onward still farther and farther from the sphere of their influence; until that home, his mother, and the valuable lessons she had taught him, were discarded altogether from his voluntary thoughts, to be remembered only in his dreams, or when wandering alone on a summer's evening he saw the peasant's cottage, and the matron at the door with a group of rosy children around her, looking up as if the glance of her eye was the language of instruction they had learned the earliest, and loved best to read.

But, still, though the blue skies of Italy were above him, though the olive and the

vine poured their riches at his feet, though the relics of the mighty past lay scattered around his path in splendid fragments and majestic ruins, and though the enchantress with her syren smile was ever at his side, the consciousness he felt of possessing all the means of human happiness, was constantly reminding him how remote—how unattainable was the end ; and the secret voice that calls upon the immortal spirit to fulfil its high behest, was never still.

It was two years before the party returned to England, and by that time Elliott Lee had, so far as his affections were concerned, effectually broken off all old associations, and established in their stead such as were neither calculated to be permanent in themselves, nor conducive to any lasting satisfaction.

The first memento he received of his early connexions, was a letter from his mother—still kind, and full of that affection which can

neither tire nor cool. The next was from his sister, written on behalf of his brother Herbert, whose very existence he had well nigh forgotten; though he had, previously to his going abroad, sent remittances of money, which he hoped might be of use to his family, especially in forwarding his brother's desire of entering the church.

To his sister's request, that he would interest his distinguished friend on behalf of Herbert, he attended faithfully; and, as Lord Nugent had at that time no living to dispose of, and all parties appeared likely to be satisfied with the curacy of Welbourne, it was from the gracious interposition of Lady Nugent with her devoted admirer, the rector, that he obtained that humble appointment.

This duty dismissed from his mind, Elliott thought no more of what he owed to his family. Indeed, he thought of little else than the amusements of the present hour; and as

these palled upon his sated appetite, and he saw and wished for nothing beyond, he was in the utmost danger of sinking into a state of morbid melancholy, to which those are most liable who are highly gifted, and who want both right means and right stimulants for mental application.

Elliott Lee was naturally generous, and there had been a time when it was easy to interest him on behalf of the injured or oppressed, and when, his warm feelings catching fire at every noble excitement, he acted with an energy and a determination that marked him out for a distinguished man. But he had now been so long accustomed to live without any definite aim, had so often found his efforts to do good frustrated by prejudice or malevolence, and had imbibed from the society around him so unconquerable a disgust for every kind of exertion, but that of killing time, that, from discarding all idea of moral

responsibility from his thoughts, he soon learned to despise the world so entirely, as to deem its highest honours, and its warmest praise, not worth the slightest struggle to attain.

CHAPTER VII.

WEARY of every place, disappointed in each change, and burdened with all society, yet shunning solitude, it became a subject of the greatest indifference to Elliott Lee, whether he spent his time in England or abroad, in town or country; and when Lady Nugent proposed that he should accompany her to Nugent Park, such was his habitual tendency to seek the relief from his own thoughts which her company and conversation still continued to afford, that he consented without hesitation; and without for one moment reflecting that the situation in which he was about to place himself, would necessarily bring him in contact

with scenes familiar to his childhood, and it might be, with persons who would make an unwelcome claim upon his acquaintance.

The favourite seat where Lord Nugent generally resided, was beautifully situated near the village of Branden, and on the banks of that river whose course we have already described as winding past the Abbey Grange, from the higher windows of which it might be traced along a verdant valley, opening out into the distant ocean.

Lord Nugent loved the country for the trifling importance he derived from driving through the villages, and having his stud of high bred horses inspected, commented upon, and envied, by the neighbouring farmers, and knowing jockies; who came oftener than angels' visits, to ascertain how much could be made out of his lordship's credulity and self-conceit.

Higher ambition than this had never fired his breast; and when his lady came down to Nugent Park with her train of admirers, to

talk sentiment, and act plays, and romance about Italy, he wished them all at the moon together, deeming that the most likely sphere for the proper development of their peculiar faculties.

Frank Nugent was very much of his father's way of thinking; and when the noble lord, with his grooms and jockey satellites, and the hopeful heir with his troop of friends, confronted Lady Nugent with hers, as heterogeneous a medley as this habitable globe affords might be seen thronging the halls, the courts, and the gardens of Nugent Park; each party avoiding the other, as if by the antipathy of instinct; except where a stray renegade from *virtù* exchanged his sentiment for jockeyship, or where Mr. Frank, at the head of all domestic rebellion, instituted an attack upon his mother's privileges, endeavouring, either openly or by covert means, to bring her and her court into contempt.

Never was a scene less calculated to charm

the taste of Elliott Lee, than that presented by Nugent Park at this time. It was the exclusiveness of Lady Nugent's circle which had hitherto held him within the sphere of its attractions. While travelling, or even during a residence in the metropolis, he had found it easy to shake off all uncongenial companionship; but here, in the dull country, where every one was thrown upon their own resources, the ill assortment of characters, the confusion, the idleness, and the consequent ennui, were absolutely intolerable.

Lady Nugent found it so, as well as her friends, and they all condoled together; but where a number of persons have openly agreed that they are not amused, and not situated to their liking, the case becomes so rapidly and decidedly worse, that nothing remains for their relief, but to separate as soon as possible; and so many of the visitors did take leave one after another, with a thousand excuses for going, all conjured up for the occasion, that if Elliott

had not remained behind out of mere compassion, the star whose brilliance had often been declared so powerful as to illuminate and cheer the darkest regions of despair, would have been left to shine alone—the centre of a vacant sphere.

When a household is divided into parties mutually repulsive to each other, it is impossible that either comfort or satisfaction should dwell within their walls; and when Elliott Lee saw clearly that Lady Nugent neither loved nor was beloved where affection ought to sweeten every duty, he looked upon her as still interesting, because she was talented, sensitive, and unhappy—as still fascinating, because she possessed every accomplishment of her sex, combined with a candour and a depth of feeling, so rarely found in those who have been flattered and admired—as pitiable, because with all her endowments she had no lasting source of happiness within herself; but he no longer looked upon her as a woman to be *loved*.

The false medium through which he had so long viewed her character, was now dispelled. The charm her fascinations had thrown around her had vanished, and he saw her as she really was, a wife without respect or affection for her husband, a mother without any definite idea of the holy duties which sanctify a mother's name; in short, a *woman without religion!* And if, by three fatal words, we would describe the most ruinous and deadly blight that ever falls within the sacred garden of domestic peace, it would be by these.

Elliott Lee felt the weight upon his spirits increase with each succeeding day. But if, while free access was open to every amusement the country affords, he had found it so difficult to prosecute with success the noble purpose of killing time, what must have been the burden of the sabbath to such a motley company!—of that day, which necessarily imposed a degree of outward decorum, just so much as to prevent the country people from making

impertinent remarks, or presuming upon the example of their superiors.

One day of this description Elliott Lee had already endured ; but when the second came, his patience proved insufficient for the trial ; and, tempted by the beauty of a summer's morning, and by the stillness of the fields now deserted by the labourers, he wandered forth alone, unconsciously directing his steps along a shaded path, which led by a circuitous route to the church of Branden.

A church, except for the sake of its music, was a place which Elliott never entered ; but there was something so picturesque in the one before him, that by way of gratifying his taste as a connoisseur in scenery, he wandered on, until at last he found himself beside a white gate, opening through a close green hedge, where honeysuckle and sweetbriar vied with each other in sending forth their scented burdens on the fresh, clear morning air.

It was half in idleness, and half for the sake

of the cool shadow of the ivied porch, that Elliott at last advanced within hearing of the lulling sound of praise and prayer which issued from the church.

He could see that the congregation was small, composed almost entirely of poor people, who were not likely to cast any very scrutinizing eyes upon a stranger, and he advanced still farther; for the sweetly modulated voice of the preacher attracted him, like a stream of natural music, and he stood with his eyes fixed intently upon the clergyman, a tall consumptive-looking young man, whose white hand, graceful but dignified deportment, and high aristocratic forehead, looked but little in accordance with the rustic audience he was addressing. Speaking with the greatest fluency and precision, yet in the simple language of the heart, he pleaded so earnestly with his hearers, and mingled so much energy and zeal with his eloquence, that his bodily strength was frequently exhausted, and he was com-

pelled to pause, and wipe the dew from his temples, and raise from his forehead the fair hair, and then wait for breath to proceed with his discourse.

During one of these intervals, his eye rested for a moment upon the countenance of Elliott.

What could there be in the glance of those mild eyes, to rouse the misanthrope from his long deep reverie? Yet, something there was, for Elliott started, and the burning crimson rushed to his very temples; while he stood as if so fixed to that cold stony floor, that nothing, not even the closing of the service, and the quiet departure of the congregation, and the preparation of the minister to desert the scene of his labours, could drive him from the spot.

As the young clergyman passed along the aisle, he turned upon the stranger an inquiring look. Again Elliott started; and, involuntarily joining the minister, they walked together through the porch, and along the pathway leading amongst the graves, through the sweetbriar hedge, into the public road.

It was distressing to observe the weakness and exhaustion under which the minister suffered ; and as he looked towards the dusty lane, along which he had to travel on foot, beneath the burning rays of a meridian sun, he paused for a moment before commencing his toilsome journey, and leaning with one arm on the gate, lifted his hat from his brow, as if to court the winds that wandered past, to come and cool his burning temples.

“ The day is oppressively warm,” said he to Elliott, who still lingered near him.

“ It is,” replied his companion, “ and you seem but ill qualified for sustaining its labours.”

“ I should do very well,” said the clergyman, “ if I had more time ; but hurrying along these dusty roads from one church to another, just in the heat of noon, distresses me exceedingly.”

“ I should have thought,” observed Elliott, “ that riding in some easy conveyance, or on a quiet horse, would have been preferable to a person in your state of health.”

The young man smiled ; “ My dear sir,”

said he, “ if to prefer, was to obtain, I dare say you would soon see me rolling in my carriage. But you must be aware that the stipend of a country curate is frequently insufficient to afford even the humblest conveyance ; and I esteem it a fair trial of the sincerity, and the zeal of a minister of the gospel, that, for a few years of his life at least, he should go about his master’s business without finding any unnecessary indulgences affixed to his calling.

“ You must not, therefore, understand me as complaining that I am not better accommodated. What I do, I do cheerfully. But sometimes, for the sake of my congregation, I regret my bodily weakness ; and for the sake of those I must leave behind me, I regret to feel that bodily weakness rapidly increasing.”

The last words were spoken in a tone of such touching melancholy, that Elliott was obliged to turn away to conceal his emotion.

“ Have you far to go ?” he asked, still with his face averted.

“ Four miles,” replied the minister, looking at his watch; “ and this reminds me that I must not loiter here.”

“ Stay one moment,” said Elliott, “ my horses are close by, at the village inn. Wait in the shade of the porch, I will return in five minutes, and drive you over—to what place?”

“ To Welbourne, if you really do not mind the trouble.”

At the name of Welbourne, Elliott half repented. But it was only half, and he soon appeared again with his handsome equipage; and the young clergyman, too kind and too generous himself to think much of any temporary obligation incurred without sacrifice of another's comfort, gratefully accepted the accommodation so opportunely offered.

It was a matter of no small surprise to the simple inhabitants of the village, to see their minister driven home in this novel style; and when he alighted on the single clean white step at his own door, some men in his situation

would have felt a little embarrassment about how they should act towards such a companion as he had brought with him. But the curate of Welbourne possessed in an uncommon degree that manly and dignified simplicity, which is the only safe dependence in all similar cases of emergency.

It was, therefore, without the slightest feeling of shame at being a lodger in the house of a poor widow, that he held out his hand to his new friend, and pressed him to enter his humble dwelling, and partake of some refreshment before his return. And Elliott, who had fallen into a bewildered state of indefinite recollections of the past, and partial consciousness of the present, attracted too by the compassion he was so capable of feeling, and by the mild, benevolent countenance of the clergyman, alighted from his carriage, and without being aware of any decided motive for what he did, entered the little parlour to which his companion politely conducted him, and sat down

directly opposite to a well-painted likeness of his mother!

It was in vain that he attempted to collect his scattered senses. Every thing around him grew misty and indistinct. But his feelings were partially relieved by the absence of his host; and, advancing towards the picture, he leaned his head upon his hands, and groaned aloud.

“This, then,” said he, “is the home where I have permitted my poor brother to find shelter—not rest—for his exhausted frame. I who have been sated with luxury, and wearied with the burden of my own wealth. Oh! my mother! is there pardon in that smile of yours, for such an ingrate son—for such a heartless brother!”

He had scarcely uttered these words, when he was roused from his soliloquy by the return of Herbert Lee, who pressed him to partake of his humble repast, with as much true politeness as if he had welcomed him to the table of a prince.

“ And you live here alone,” said Elliott, determined to penetrate as far as he could, without incurring the charge of impertinence, into the real state of his brother’s circumstances ; for, on learning from Lady Nugent that he had obtained the curacy of Welbourne, he had so entirely dismissed him from his thoughts, as never to have inquired what the curacy was worth.

“ I can never be alone,” replied Herbert, pointing to a pile of books. “ I have companions that never tire. And perhaps those who live in what is called society, can seldom say so much.”

“ Your remark is but too just,” said Elliott. “ At least I can answer for myself, that there is a sense of weariness beyond the power of society to charm away. But have you no other friends than these silent books to cheer your solitude ?”

“ Oh yes,” replied Herbert, smiling. “ Like all romantic youths, I have my good angel,

who comes in seasons of sickness and sorrow, bringing medicine of sovereign efficacy, both for body and mind."

"Is this your good angel?" asked Elliott, glancing at the picture.

"To speak more seriously," replied his brother, "that is indeed my good angel—that is my mother. But the minister of consolation to whom I was alluding, is Mary Grey, a young lady who resides about three miles from this place, and who is well known to every widow and orphan, in short—to every sufferer within the sphere of her benevolence. Did you ever hear of Mary Grey?"

"I think the name is not quite new to me," replied Elliott. "Is not Welbourne House the property of her father?"

"It was; but great pecuniary troubles have lately fallen upon poor Stephen Grey. The old gentleman has failed."

"Failed! Then what has become of him, and his iron rule?"

“ Ah ! I find you know more of the family than I was aware of. The rule that now regulates the affairs of Welbourne House, is one of pure generosity and affection. His second daughter, lately left a widow, with the command, it is said, of very ample resources, has purchased the estate ; and she, and her admirable sister, of whom I first spoke, endeavour with the tenderest solicitude, to promote the happiness of a father, who was thought in their childhood to be too regardless of theirs.”

“ And is his cold heart warmed into anything like gratitude by their kindness ?”

“ He is indeed an altered man, materially altered in his feelings, though his personal habits of self-denial and austerity, are extended to a degree that has already given him a character of premature old age, and seems likely to cut short an existence, which he appears to regard as no longer valuable to himself or others.”

Beyond the general aspect of their domestic

affairs, Herbert Lee knew little of the families around ; for, had his post of duty been in the wilds of Siberia, he could not have been farther removed by distance, than he now was by the nature of his habits and disposition, from the idle and impertinent gossip of the village. Yet to such details as his limited means of information enabled him to give, of the only family with whom he was a frequent and familiar guest, his brother listened with an interest which he would have previously thought himself incapable of feeling, in scenes and circumstances so distant from the sphere in which he had recently been moving . And when the clergyman, reminded by the hour of the day that it was time to resume his pastoral duties, apologized for his unceremonious departure, Elliott accompanied him as far as the gate leading to the church ; and then sauntered along the village road, expressly to order his carriage, but, in reality, to cherish in silence and loneliness the recollections which he still felt to

cling with some degree of warmth around his heart.

The churchyard of Welbourne, had always been celebrated for the extensive and beautiful view it commanded of the adjacent country ; and when the last of the congregation—the infirm and the indolent, had wound their way along the path, and entered within the venerable walls, leaving the wanderer to pursue his meditations unobserved, Elliott returned to the scene so familiar to his childhood, and placed himself once more beneath the shade of the sycamores, where he remembered to have stood with Allan Grey, when the evening breeze lifted the bright curls from his temples, and fanned a forehead as beautiful, as it was then free from every stain of sin or sorrow.

He turned to look at the grave on which they had sat together, and which, by some strange association, had remained like a distinct picture on the page of his memory. The name was still legible on the stone tablet, but

grass and weeds had grown so thickly over the little mound of earth, that it was scarcely distinguishable from the surrounding wilderness.

“Is it then so long,” said Elliott Lee, “since I was a happy and innocent boy? Are there so many wasted years to add to my account with heaven? It is better to sleep beneath these stones, than to live as I am living.”

And he walked to where a white marble slab enclosed within an iron railing, indicated that the poor “inhabitant below,” had but recently returned to that mother, who receives into the silent repose of her embrace the ungrateful children who have spurned her bounties, and trampled heedlessly upon her fruitful bosom.

Elliott leaned over the rails to obtain a clearer view of the characters engraven upon this tombstone, and he started to read the name of Allan Grey; for though his death was an event which had casually reached him, the impression it had made upon his feelings then, was totally different from that produced by

finding his name written amongst the dead, in the midst of the very scenes with which his living memory was associated.

So entirely distinct was the sphere in which Elliott had lately lived from all connexion with the circumstances of his early life, that, except when he had been recognised by Allan in London, and when, through his acquaintance with Frank Nugent and his associates, he had become acquainted with the character and situation of Mrs. Maxwell, he had seldom been reminded of the Greys of Welbourne House; and still less frequently had made them the subject of his inquiries. For, along with the remembrance of his early life, especially of his own family, there arose so many painful reflections, that he was glad to banish them entirely from his mind; and the Greys had never interested him so deeply as to be associated with any feelings he was at all solicitous to cherish.

“Poor Allan!” said he, turning away from

the grave; “your literary cares must have been soon terminated. And perhaps you had some goal in view worth all the struggle of attaining,—some golden dream that you would have lived to realize; while I, who have neither hope, nor aim, nor object of ambition, drag on a weary and isolated existence, as irksome to myself, as unprofitable to others.”

Weighed down with the burden of his own morbid and miserable feelings, Elliott Lee arrived at the gates leading through Nugent Park, up to the door of the mansion; and, dismissing his carriage, he walked leisurely along by a retired and private path, in order that his return being unobserved, he might avoid all impertinent inquiries about his absence.

He had, however, little inclination to mix again in the scenes of dissension and disorder, which rendered the country residence of Lord and Lady Nugent any thing but an inviting or agreeable abode; and as the day advanced,

and the shadows lengthened on the ground, the beauties of a glorious sunset invited him to a little sylvan temple, kept sacred by its fair proprietor from the intrusion of what she called the "rabble rout."

On the steps of this temple Elliott sat down to muse, for his heart was oppressed with heavy and conflicting thoughts; and the countenance of his mother, as he had just seen it portrayed, with her own peculiar smile of beauty and benevolence, was present with him wherever he went, and rose before him on whatever object he turned his earnest gaze.

"I was happy," said he, in mental soliloquy, "in those golden days of blessed innocence. Have I been happy since? Is it to maintain his innocence then, that man is doomed to bear the ills of life?"

And when he had asked himself this question, he plunged into a long reverie upon the nature and origin of evil—that grand mystery

of our being which lies hid amongst the secrets of eternity.

He had a second time presumptuously questioned why, in the great scheme of creation, temptation to sin should have been placed before a creature, weak and fallible as man, when his fruitless meditations were interrupted by the sound of a deep sigh, and, looking round, he beheld the figure of Lady Nugent leaning with her head upon her hand, and gazing intently from an open window, where rich clusters of flowers, as fair and fragrant as ever bloomed in the garden of Eden, wove themselves into a gorgeous canopy, and sent the gentle wind, that rustled amongst their delicate leaves, away, to wander over hill and dale, laden with the delicious perfume of their odorous sweets.

The interior of the building had been adorned after the pure and classical taste of its presiding genius. Statues of Grecian

symmetry stood in their sublime and marble beauty all around; and sculptured vases, filled with flowers of every hue, gave a richness and a glow, heightened by the rays of the declining sun, to the whole atmosphere of this enchanted scene.

Sound there was none in heaven or earth, save the sweet melody of Eolian harps, and that one sigh!

Alas! the bright inhabitant of that poetic region was surrounded by all that art and nature can produce of beauty and perfection; will all that taste can select, and all that gold can purchase; yet she was not happy! And as the last—the only friend on whom she felt the power of trusting, advanced towards her, he saw that the trace of tears was upon her cheek, and that the smile she immediately assumed, was one of sadness mingled with affection.

“You are a truant,” said Lady Nugent, extending her hand to Elliott, “at the very time when you are most wanted. I never

spent so dull a day as this; and when you knew that I should be worse than lonely, you left me. Ah! my young friend, it is the way of the world. I know it well—I have been left before!”

Lady Nugent said this with so much feeling, that Elliott turned upon her the compassionating look to which she had become too much accustomed, and he was forgiven.

“ You know,” she continued, “ that I am one of those who believe that we have all a destiny marked out for us, and that this destiny depends upon one event of our lives, of infinite importance to ourselves, though probably not known, or not observed by others. I have never yet told you what was the peculiar circumstance which had this influence upon my fate; and you have had too much delicacy to ask, even so much as why I connected myself with the family of Nugent.

“ Know, then, I was a young girl as simple as yon milkmaid who glides along the valley,

when the fame of my own talents first reached me; and from that moment I was fired with an ambition which has been the destroyer of my peace. Had I mixed more with the world, I should have known that fame and happiness are not synonymous words; and that celebrity is but a miserable substitute for contentment. But I led an isolated life, and I thought the poets, and the orators, and the mighty geniuses of whom I read and heard, were creatures endowed with every means of happiness, and far removed from every sense of ordinary pain. That I should ever join their phalanx, and add my name to the golden record of their glory, was a hope I seldom dared to cherish. But—and I blush to say it—when this idea did flit across my soul, it brought with it more intense emotions, than when I thought of joining the host of heaven.

“ You know that, with all my daring, my ambition, and my self-dependence, I am, as regards the affections of the heart, a very, very

woman. I need not tell you that I loved; but the object of my love was the last man in the world to be happy with a celebrated wife. We were long plighted to each other, and I believe I was worth loving then, for I was unsophisticated, and I had such pure warm feelings to bestow on others, that I not unfrequently forgot myself.

“ It is true I was so kindly cherished, and watched over with such unvarying fondness, that I had no need to devise plans for my own enjoyment; for you are aware it is sometimes in our own defence that we become selfish. With all this solicitude for my happiness, however, there was mingled a jealousy, not difficult to forgive, since it arose out of the intensity of affection.

“ I have said that the being I loved was the last—the very last who ought to have linked his fate with mine. He was jealous of my talents, and of the time I devoted to literary pursuits; but, above all, he dreaded my be-

coming distinguished ; for he knew the enthusiasm which filled my breast, and his thoughts of home, and of home comforts, were like those of the brooding dove, circumscribed within the limits of some quiet nest in the wilderness, where no eye but mine should look upon his happiness.

“ The duty of making sacrifices was one to which I had been so little accustomed, that the idea of devoting my talents to the delight of one being only, was rejected as contemptible and absurd, as often as it crossed my mind, and I determined to write a book, and risk the consequences.

“ Upon the simple fact of my sending this book into the world, the fabric of my future fate was built. And though I knew and felt how much of happiness I had at stake, yet never did the alchemist ponder in secret with more intense enthusiasm upon the mysterious mingling of strange elements, whose combination should be more than life or death, than I

upon that simple story of human love, and human grief, whose interest marked me out before the world as a young and hopeful genius.

“While I wove this story, I kept my charmed wreath unseen by every human eye ; and one day as I sat alone with him who strove in vain to rule my destiny, talking of that secluded life for which I was so little calculated, a packet was placed in my hand, containing my first volume, accompanied with the most extravagant praises of more than one of the public journals of the day.

“I could not conceal my emotion. My cheeks were crimson, and I felt as if flashes of real fire were sparkling in my eyes. The cause was soon perceived, and the consequence was—I was deserted !

“I know not of what materials the heart to whose love I had too fondly trusted was composed, but mine was almost broken ; and as I had sacrificed the first treasure of my life for

fame, I determined from that time that fame should be my idol.

“I wanted rank—I wanted wealth—I wanted every thing but talent to raise me to the elevation at which my ambition pointed; and, amongst the many offers awaiting my first entrance into public life, I fixed upon the title and establishment of Lord Nugent, as most worthy of my choice.

“The rest you know. And you know also, that you see before you, in all that remains of an *ambitious woman*, the most miserable of human beings!”

Elliott Lee was shocked and pained beyond the power of words to express. He had before understood too much of Lady Nugent's real situation. But then it had been only *understood*. Now that it was actually revealed, now that the mysterious veil of silence and delicacy was withdrawn from her lacerated heart, he looked with horror upon the wounds which her own rashness had inflicted, and which her

own recklessness and despair rendered it impossible to heal.

We read in romances of the compulsory marriages of heart-broken heroines ; and sometimes, in the dark passages of real life, we see cause to suspect that the young—inexperienced—unconscious victims of parental ambition, are made to sacrifice at the altar the whole happiness of their future lives ; but when we hear of a woman voluntarily marrying without love, every good and noble feeling implanted in our nature rises in arms against her ; and whatever may have been her motives, or however great the price she has paid, we regard her less with pity than disgust.

It was in this way that the spell which had so long bound Elliott Lee was broken ; that the mist was cleared away from his mental vision ; and that she who had led him through the world a willing captive in her train, now lost the power to keep him by her side.

But as the magician sometimes continues to

display his wonder-working skill, unconscious that a counter charm is operating against him, until the whole fabric of his mysterious art is overthrown, she spoke and smiled with the blandishment of happier days; nor knew that her voice, so melodious in all its tones, was now like a lute unheeded, whose trembling chords the winds alone have touched—whose sweetness falls upon the unconscious breeze—whose music there is none to hear.

CHAPTER VIII.

IT was not many days after Elliott Lee had been so unexpectedly brought in contact with his brother, that, seated one morning by the side of Lady Nugent, and assisting as well as he was able to wile away the weariness of the lingering hours, a most unwelcome visitor was announced, in the person of the rector of Branden, who took every opportunity, timely and untimely, of paying his respects to his lady patroness, though her ill-suppressed yawns might have deterred a guest more easily repulsed from prosecuting his unwearied endeavours to please.

“A few days since,” said he, after the com-

plimentary preface with which every speech was ushered in, "I made it my business to thank your ladyship for recommending to my choice so very eligible a young man as Mr. Lee for my curate."

"For *your* curate!" said Elliott to himself. "That I should live to hear this consolidation of obesity call my brother *his* curate!"

This mental ejaculation, however, being prudently confined to the indignant bosom where it originated, the clergyman went on.

"But now I regret to say, all my hopes of being relieved from some portion of my pastoral duties, are disappointed for the present. My curate is ill—dangerously ill, I am told—not likely to recover."

"How?—when?" exclaimed Elliott. "He attended to the service of both your churches on Sunday last. Has he been worse since?"

"I was not aware," replied the rector, "that he had been ill before."

"Then you could scarcely have seen him,"

observed Elliott, in no very complacent tone, "for he has death written on his countenance."

"I beg your pardon," resumed the rector, "I have seen my curate often; and, except for a little of the pallor of a student, I should have said he was in perfect health. The case, however, is now materially altered. I am told he was attacked on Monday night with very alarming symptoms; and, even taking the most favourable view of the affair, I should suppose he will not be able to preach for a month to come."

"I will take care," exclaimed Elliott, laying peculiar emphasis upon the first word, "that my brother is not required to preach too soon."

"Sir?" said the rector, with blank astonishment; for Lady Nugent had not thought it necessary to introduce her friend to such a visitor.

"I say," resumed Elliott, "that *my brother*

Herbert Lee *shall* have the advantage of perfect rest, so long as his case requires it."

"Unquestionably!" replied the rector, with a voice more gently modulated. "Where there is so much delicacy of constitution, great care is necessary. I should be the last man in existence to press hardly upon those whom I employ. I only grieve—I exceedingly regret—"

But ere his speech was concluded, Elliott had left the room, and was already hastening across the lawn with rapid strides, yet without any definite purpose, except to direct his steps towards the village of Welbourne.

Lost in a train of reflections almost entirely novel to his mind, he had neglected to calculate the distance, or to take such means as common forethought would have suggested for arriving with the greatest facility at the scene of interest.

To be ill, and poor, and the occupant of common lodgings, implies an aggregated sum

of misery, which the pampered sons and daughters of luxury are wholly incapable of conceiving. But yet, when the thought of his brother's illness rushed upon his mind, in connexion with that small parlour in the widow's house, and the humble means of comfort her situation was likely to afford; and especially when the pale and suffering youth, in whom he had become so deeply interested, was made the subject of the heartless calculations of his employer, Elliott felt the most poignant self-upbraidings for having consigned his brother to this fate: or, what to a man of generous feelings was the same—for having neglected to place him in circumstances where the indulgences of life could be more easily obtained.

“Yet why should I seek him on his sick-bed?” said he, pausing ere he entered upon the public road. “Am I prepared to fall, like a returning prodigal upon his neck?—to be welcomed, and wept over, like a penitent, who

humbly solicits the direction of a guiding hand to point out to him a better way? Am I prepared for the tears of women, and the methodical cant of worthy souls, who would coo me back into the peaceful nest, and brood over me with their gentle wings, until I sunk into the dead calm in which they luxuriate? Am I prepared to become one of them?—to settle myself down in their rural habitations; and, after selecting my pew in the village church, to marry the parson's daughter, and, in good time, to lead my little boys and girls by their gloveless hands along the aisle, and before the multitudinous poor, who would bless my wife for her cottage comforts, and me for the meritorious example of my domestic life?"

It was in this way, by giving loose to his imagination, always too fertile in multiplying repulsive images, that Elliott Lee wrought up his feelings to a degree of disgust and loathing for the kind of life, which he persuaded himself, that all religious persons were com-

pelled to lead. And this feeling it was, that subdued every latent desire to prove experimentally whether his conclusions were correct, or even to subject himself to the anticipated consequences of a disclosure of his name. But still the thought of his brother's situation urged him on, and he proceeded towards his residence, with a vague hope of being in some way useful to him, though undecided as to the means by which this desire could be accomplished.

That Herbert Lee should have been able to see and converse with his brother, without the slightest suspicion of who he really was, is not to be wondered at, when we consider the difference in their respective ages; that Elliott had from an early period of his life entirely absented himself from his own family; that his travels abroad, and his intercourse with the world in general, had given him an air and manner essentially different from what he would have acquired within a

limited domestic circle; and that the young student was so much better read in books than men, that he took little note of the distinctive traits of human character.

The quickness of a woman's eye would, in the present instance, have materially assisted his perceptions, and, roused to more than common curiosity, he had anticipated the pleasure of describing to his friends, Mary and Harriet, his interview with the mysterious stranger; when the attack of illness, before alluded to, interrupted the train of his thoughts, and deprived him, under the interdiction of his medical attendant, of the advantage of colloquial intercourse.

Having at last persuaded himself that he might, without any impertinent comments from the people of the village, call upon the widow with whom his brother lodged, and inquire after his health, Elliott Lee passed through the garden gate, and finding the door open, entered without ceremony, hoping by

this means to be able to make his inquiries with less observation.

What, then, was his surprise, on beholding, instead of the woman of the house, a female, simply but elegantly dressed, surrounded by the widow's children, and holding the youngest infant in her arms.

At the sound of his approaching step, she had risen from her seat, and, as she glanced a second time towards him, there rushed into her cheeks a crimson glow, free from all taint of shame, while her eloquent eyes spoke in the language of partial recognition, wonder, and deep interest.

Elliott was the first to speak. "Pardon my intrusion," said he; "I called merely to inquire after the health of Mr. Lee, and finding the door open, I thought the good woman of the house would forgive me for entering without notice."

"The woman of the house is absent just now," said Mary Grey, for it was she who had

sent her out to procure some necessary comforts for the patient, while she took charge of the children, in order that she might not miss the daily visitation of the doctor. "But perhaps I can answer your inquiries as well as any one, for Dr. Maurice has just been here, and reports his patient to be not worse than yesterday; but in a situation requiring the most scrupulous regard to quiet, both of mind and body. I had pleased myself with the idea of having him removed to my father's residence, three miles off, where he would have many advantages impossible to be obtained here, but the doctor tells me it would be too great a risk to make the attempt at present."

"Has the young gentleman," said Elliott, determined if possible to divert Mary's suspicions from himself, "no female relatives, who could take charge of him in this critical state?"

"He has relatives," replied Mary, "the best and the kindest; but his excellent mother

is suffering from a recent attack of paralysis, which would render it as difficult for her to undertake a journey, as improper for her to be deprived of the kind attentions of her daughter; and, in the mean time, my sister and I endeavour as well as we can to supply the place of nearer connexions, and dearer friends."

At the intelligence conveyed by the first part of this sentence, Elliott had started and turned away to conceal his emotion. The rest fell unheeded on his ear. For the idea of age and infirmity, as connected with his mother, had never before so much as crossed his mind. To him, her memory had ever appeared enshrined in beauty, animated with vigour, and powerful alike to command or to allure. To imagine her feeble—helpless—paralysed!—the thought was horror; and for the first time he felt that he could not, even if he would, return to the *same* parent he had ungratefully deserted; that the vision of the guardian angel, who had bent

over him in his couch of early rest, could never be recalled; that the light which surrounded his childish footsteps was extinguished; and that the radiance of the morning of his life was lost for ever.

“ Perhaps,” said he, recovering his self possession, “ before many days are over, the doctor will permit his patient to be removed. In that case, I should be most happy to render every assistance—every accommodation in my power.”

“ We are indeed in want of able assistance,” said Mary; “ and I thank you from my heart. But to whom should I apply ?”

Elliott was again involved in difficulties, with the additional embarrassment of having brought them upon himself; but while he prepared, or affected to prepare, to write an address, the woman of the house entered, and Mary went again to visit the invalid before she returned home.

A respectable and competent nurse being in

constant attendance, she soon appeared again, reporting that the patient slept; and then assuring the widow that she might depend upon seeing either herself or her sister early on the following morning, she took her leave. Suddenly however she recollected Elliott's kind offer, and while hesitating whether she could with propriety accept his offered help, he joined her in the garden, and walked with her along the path leading to Welbourne House.

Though fully assured in her own mind, that her companion was the same individual, who, besides affording her such welcome assistance on her journey, had rendered her sister a much more important service; yet, observing no signs of recognition in his countenance or manner, it became a point of delicacy with her to treat him as a perfect stranger, though the natural warmth of her feelings every moment, threatened to betray her secret conviction; nor did the circumstance of her unknown friend living at present in the neighbourhood of

Welbourne excite any surprise, as she had from the first supposed him to be one of Frank Nugent's associates—perhaps one of his mother's friends ; though how he should have become interested in Herbert Lee, was a mystery for which she could find no solution. She therefore turned from her own cogitations, to converse with her usual simplicity of heart, and urbanity of manner, on the only subject which she supposed could be immediately interesting, both to her and her companion.

“ You must pardon,” said she, “ the extreme readiness with which I appeared willing to avail myself of the kindness of a stranger. I have felt so much for this excellent young man—this noble-hearted sufferer, that I seem to forget the common proprieties of life, in devising means to serve him. My sister and I are just now very particularly circumstanced. The brother to whom we have been accustomed to look for every kindness, is absent on a journey, and, I grieve to say it, Herbert Lee is forgotten

by the only relative who could afford him any efficient help."

"To whom do you allude?" said Elliott, with his countenance averted.

"Do you not know that he has a brother?" asked Mary; but she spoke too rapidly to allow time for an answer; for her heart was full of grief and indignation. "He has a brother," she continued, "who knows not how to spend his wealth, nor cares for what purpose his great advantages of mind and circumstances have been bestowed."

"If his means are ample, does he not assist his family?"

"I believe he doles out to them remittances of money, but he refuses to sanction the gift with his own name, which alone could make it acceptable to noble hearts like theirs."

"And if his brother's illness should call him back to his early connexions, do you think that his habits and character are such as could add to their happiness?"

“ Perhaps not; and in that case he does well to stand aloof. But oh! if I could see him!” and she stopped, and looked earnestly in Elliott’s face, while her own was lighted up with an expression of intense and almost impassioned fervour. “ If I could tell him how many tears and heart-aches he has caused, all for the gratification of his own caprice—his own pride—his own ambition. If I could tell him how much bitterness he has mingled with those tears, and by what a sacrifice he has purchased the privilege of adding one captive more to the train of a celebrated woman! But I would not—I could not tell him all, for he is the brother of my best friend; and I remember the time when we played together beneath these very trees. No, no, my indignation rises when I think what he might have been to those I love; but I only long the more that some enchantress with a holier influence than hers to whom he devotes his life, would lure him back to the

ways of virtue ; for I know—I feel that he has a heart still richly worth reclaiming.

“ I had not thought,” continued Mary, astonished at her own enthusiasm, “ nor is it prudent—that I should speak in this way to a stranger ; but as I have so far transgressed the rules of common delicacy, I will candidly tell you the reason why I cannot address you with the reserve which perhaps I ought. I am aware that we have met before.”

“ We have,” said Elliott ; “ and I should not have intruded my company upon you in this walk, but that I wished to apologize to you for doing what few things can justify—for having addressed to you an anonymous letter.”

“ It needs no apology,” said Mary ; “ you did me and my family the greatest service, for which I never can sufficiently thank you.”

“ Still,” continued Elliott, “ the circumstance requires some explanation. Though far from ranking myself amongst Frank Nugent’s friends, I was necessarily so much

associated with him, as to have frequent opportunities of hearing your sister spoken of by him and his companions, in a manner calculated to be most injurious to her future fame. To have treated him in what is called the most gentlemanly way, in short, to have called him out, would have been doing little service to your sister, as it would have attached to her name the *eclat* of a duel ; and I was moreover prevented from adopting this mode of settling the affair, by other considerations unconnected with myself. To me, therefore, there appeared but one alternative ; and, hateful as it was, I adopted it, secure in the admirable character of her whom I addressed, that no weakness or want of consideration on her part would bring about the consequences most to be dreaded."

" The result has been such," added Mary, " as leaves you nothing to regret, while it supplies me with a cause for heartfelt gratitude through the whole of my future life. There

are many questions in reference to this subject, which curiosity would prompt me to ask, but I will confine myself to one. Did you know my sister personally?"

"You may ask me that, or any thing else," replied Elliott, who, while Mary was speaking had thought of an expedient for preserving his incognito. "I do not know your sister personally, nor should I have been so well acquainted with you, as to have made the strange appeal I did to your feelings, but for the letters of Catherine Lee, the sister of my friend; for you must understand that the ungrateful son, the unnatural brother, you have so justly condemned, is one with whom I am intimately acquainted."

"How imprudent, how thoughtless have I been!" exclaimed Mary. "If Elliott Lee is indeed your friend, I must have deeply wounded your feelings." And she turned to her companion a look which silently implored the pardon he was not slow to grant; for tears

were in her earnest eyes ; and we have said before, that in the beauty of expression—the beauty that finds a ready access to the heart, she was not rivalled by the most interesting or distinguished of her sex.

“ And this is the return I have made for all your kindness,” said she, pausing at the entrance of the road which led directly up to Welbourne House.

“ Name it not,” said Elliott. “ You spoke from the impulse of a noble heart. Would to heaven your words had power to soften one of stone ! Good morning, Miss Grey. I will bring you farther tidings of my friend if you will permit me to call on you to-morrow morning ; for I assure you he is more interested than you give him credit for, in the happiness of his brother.”

“ Good morning,” said Mary, offering her hand to the stranger in tacit acknowledgment that she did not refuse his offered acquaintance ; though, from the excitement of her feel-

ings, she neglected to assure herself, as *she* might have done, with perfect simplicity, of his residence and name.

And here it may not be amiss to remind the reader on behalf of our heroine, that Mary Grey had lived always in the country, where the conventional rules of artificial life are little known, and less regarded; that being early thrown upon the resources of her own heart and understanding, she had, unlike the generality of women, become more independent of public opinion than of the dictates of her conscience; and that, having known little of a mother's care in the formation of her character, it was less distinguished by conformity with the common forms of society, than by its genuine candour, delicacy, and uprightness.

CHAPTER IX.

AMONGST the many punishments entailed upon us as delinquents in the moral school, perhaps none is more distressing to the generous mind, than to be met with unmerited approbation by those who cannot, with any degree of propriety, be made to understand how far they are from having seen the real truth.

The young widow, whose peculiar grief we have described, was followed by this punishment wherever she went. At home, abroad, in ministering to the needy, in visiting the sick, a kind, condoling sympathy awaited her; and pitying friends bewailed her lonely state, as if the prop of all her earthly happiness had

been removed. But never did she feel the true compunction of a penitent more keenly, than when associating with Herbert Lee; whose pure and dignified character raised him so far above the common vices of humanity, that, except where they were forced upon his notice, he did not even believe them to exist, and therefore remained unconscious of his own superiority.

To him the name of widow was invested with a sacredness, which he regarded as peculiar to those who have been purified by the chastenings of divine love; and when Harriet took her place beside his sick bed, he believed himself to be in the presence of one with whom he could mingle and communicate his holiest feelings.

It is needless to say how often the glow of deep burning shame suffused the cheeks of her who had no word to utter in return; nor how she turned away to conceal the agony of mind that found no language but in tears.

It was on the morning after Mary's interview with Elliott Lee, that she took her post of duty, now converted into one of intense interest, and sometimes of enjoyment; when the sufferer, who had spent a night of such distressing weakness as seemed to bring him near to the brink of eternity, looked up to welcome her, with the countenance of one whose mind is already filled with the radiance of a purer, happier sphere.

There is a degree of illness which sets at nought the scrupulous forms of society; and Herbert Lee felt no hesitation in conversing on themes of the gravest import, even with one so young as Harriet, and so lately classed among his friends, because he believed her to have been tried in the furnace of affliction, and raised above the common weakness and selfishness of humanity.

"I believe," said he, "I ought to apologize for occupying so much of your valuable time, but I cannot suppose that the weariness of a

sick chamber is irksome to you, as it is to those who have not early been inured to pain and sorrow."

Harriet made no reply, and he went on—"I have often thought, what consolation must be felt by those who can reflect upon a death-bed, that their best friends are gone before them to heaven—that the bonds of affection, severed as it were but for a moment, shall be reunited for ever in a world of peace!

"Pardon me," said he, extending his hand to Harriet, for he saw that tears were streaming from her eyes. "I dwell so much upon these thoughts now, that I forget there may be minds more delicately constituted than my own, to whom they may be clothed with a tenderness which renders them unfit for words.

"My dear friend," he continued, in a tone of the kindest sympathy, "I cannot close again the fountain of grief so heedlessly opened. I can only pray to the Father of light, to hallow the tears I have called forth."

“ You can do more,” said Harriet, “ you can assist me to purify the source from whence they flow.”

“ It is possible we may assist each other,” replied Herbert, “ for the weak can sometimes be serviceable to the strong. But when I look at you, and think how much of sorrow has already shadowed the morning of your life, what I would ask of you is, to teach me how to bear my sufferings as I ought.”

“ I!” exclaimed Harriet, and she seemed to shrink, as if self-convicted, from the thought. “ Oh, do not mock me with a language so new to my ear—so foreign to my deserts. Instead of the religious mourner whom your imagination pictures, you see before you one of the most worthless and degraded of the children of misery.”

Herbert smiled incredulously. He knew that such was the language held by many pious Christians, when alluding to the evil of their own hearts; and his admiration of Harriet’s

character was heightened, rather than diminished on finding, that to all her other virtues she added that of the most profound humility.

While the two friends, so differently constituted, yet so closely and necessarily drawn together, occupied the morning hours, alternately in conversing on themes of mutual interest, and in settling into that silence so salutary to the exhausted invalid, Elliott Lee made his promised visit to Welbourne House, prompted by a newly awakened curiosity, for which he half despised himself.

Beautiful, elegant, and accomplished women, he had seen in many countries, and under many aspects of society; but a woman in whose countenance and manners enthusiasm and simplicity, energy and sensitiveness, firmness and delicacy, were conspicuously blended, he had never seen before he met with Mary Grey. And he felt an unconquerable desire to hear again the soul-inspiring language of a voice whose very tones were melody; and to

meet again the glance of those expressive eyes, whose sadness was for the sufferings of earth, whose joyous light was from heaven.

It is a striking and incontrovertible proof of the efficacy of virtue, that men of libertine sentiments and habits almost universally reverence it in woman ; and blindly as Elliott Lee disclaimed the necessity of religion for himself, he had never been able to efface from his mind the conviction of his early life, that it was essential to the perfection of the female character.

In the calm clear countenance of Mary Grey, there was no haggard look of weariness or disappointment, indicating that melancholy waste of thought and feeling, which the warm young heart, burning and beating within the contracted circle of its earth-born sensations, too early learns to feel ; but the free and vigorous intelligence of a mind, less satiated with the knowledge of what possesses a visible or tangible existence, than ambitious to learn what is holiest and best. To such a mind the book of life has always some pages fresh and

beautiful ; and the truths revealed by nature unfold themselves with a perpetual charm, without producing either satiety or disappointment.

Elliott Lee had been apt in acquiring the wisdom of the world, but of the philosophy of religion he was profoundly ignorant ; and it was from the character of an unsophisticated woman that he now began to conceive something of its awful depth, and its mysterious power : while he saw that its holy restrictions, divested of that deadness and narrowness which he had hitherto regarded as degrading shackles to the understanding, were rather a protection, a support, and a stimulus, of such a nature, as to elevate the talents, and purify the soul.

“ Perhaps you are not aware,” said he to Mary, in the familiar conversation which her unsuspecting manners tended to encourage, rather than forbid, “ that my friend’s besetting sin is pride ; and that every latent desire he may feel to renew his intercourse with his family, is restrained by his repugnance to be

met with an extravagant display of feeling or affection, which it may not be in his power to return."

"Let him not think of that," said Mary. "We, who lead such quiet isolated lives, are sometimes less ignorant, than you men of the world imagine, of what the human heart is liable to suffer or enjoy; and let not Elliott Lee suppose that his family are less distinguished than himself by true delicacy and dignity of character. Let him not think that habits of simplicity belong only to the vulgar or the gross. Let him not believe that religion has necessarily an aspect and a phraseology repulsive to a polished mind."

"It is not that, exactly," said Elliott; "it is that he dreads the tears of his mother—the upbraidings of his sister."

"Leave that to me," replied Mary. "I know them both intimately, and would gladly employ every faculty I possess in arranging such a meeting as would occasion your friend

the least possible disgust or pain. All that I urge—I might almost say all that I desire, is that he would permit this meeting to take place.”

“And what then?” asked Elliott, afraid that Mary was laying plans for his conduct, which he was by no means prepared to act upon.

“Then let him choose for himself, whether he will stand forth before the world, as a man of worth, and influence, and independent feeling; or whether he will remain a mere non-entity, unknown—or known only where he is neither loved nor valued. Let him choose whether he will still continue to misuse the faculties which God has given him; or devote, to purposes of benevolence and utility, the powers of his expansive mind, and the resources of his ample fortune. Let him choose whether he will turn the affections of his heart, once warm with every good and noble feeling, into their legitimate and wholesome channel; or whether he will still continue to flutter, like

an idle moth, around the light which dazzles, without being able to illuminate his mind."

"You are too severe, Miss Grey."

"No, I am not severe. I am only in earnest. Heaven knows I am ready to welcome Elliott Lee with the love of a sister, whenever he will recollect himself, and return to his duties. Can I give a greater proof of my sincere—my affectionate interest in him, than to wish him to be more happy; for, say what he may, I do not believe he is happy now."

"It is no breach of confidence to say that he is not. But how would you render the present less irksome to him, or the future more inviting?"

"By investing one with all the dignified and honourable virtues of a man—the other with the laudable ambition of a Christian. It is not in the nature of a mind like his to reap satisfaction without usefulness. If he retains any portion of the energy which distinguished him in early life, he must want an object for it to

spend itself in attaining. To the humblest mind it is necessary to have some purpose for which to think, and feel, and live; for the noblest, and the most highly gifted, existence without hope, or aim, or object, is nothing less than torture.

“ Believe me when I say I am so fully convinced of this truth, that there never passes a day in which your friend does not form the subject of my anxious thoughts; and that I seldom breathe a prayer in which his name is not upon my lips. What more can I do for him? Oh, tell me, if you know; for such is the love I bear his family—such the debt of gratitude I owe them, that as far as woman may, I would venture for his sake.”

“ And while you feel all this interest for his family, have you none for him personally?”

“ How should I? I have never seen him since we played together as children; and all that I remember of him is, as a boy—haughty and handsome—and,” she continued, blushing,

“I was going to add, something like yourself; but I fear, after what I have already said, it would be a very equivocal compliment.”

Elliott smiled ; and, conscious that his interview with Mary had far exceeded the limits of a morning call, he took his leave, promising that his friend should be made acquainted with her generous wishes, and her noble willingness to assist him in overcoming every obstacle that might intervene between him and the indulgence of his better feelings.

On returning to Nugent Park, Elliott found the lady of the mansion awaiting his reappearance with a countenance marked with traces of impatience, which he vainly endeavoured, by common-place apologies, to remove.

“My horses were ready two hours ago,” said she, “and now the beauty of the day is past.”

“By no means,” said Elliott, handing her ladyship into the carriage. “If we drive towards the sea, we shall find the air delightfully refreshing.”

“The sea! It is at least four miles distant.”

“Can the distance alarm you, when we have travelled over half the globe together?”

“It is not the distance exactly, that I care for; but I am neither in health nor spirits, and the atmosphere of this country weighs upon my very soul.”

“I am sorry this novelty in your charmed existence should have occurred just now, for I am about to make a more than common claim upon your patience. I am going to talk to you very seriously.

“‘Do thy spiriting gently’ then. What you have to say, say briefly, that I may escape all unnecessary pain.”

“Why this unwonted sadness, my dear friend! Has any thing occurred to distress you?”

“No. One day is like another to me. And yet I have lately suffered from a strange feeling of apprehension, as unaccountable to reason, as it is without form and void. I cannot

gaze upon the earth, but it seems to be fading away—I cannot contemplate the heavens, but they lower upon me. And yet, when we look around on such a scene as this, surely there is enough to fill the imagination with images of beauty—to soothe the heart with promises of peace.”

“It is, indeed, lovely as ever rose upon a poet’s dream.”

“But when the wings of the dark angel are above me, I ask, why all this prodigality of nature? why all this varied garden, redolent of sweets, vocal with most harmonious sounds, and magnificently coloured with hues of never fading beauty? Why all this, and man the centre of the blooming paradise, without the power to appropriate its delights; and woman, with her warmer heart, her more intense perceptions, and her higher sense of bliss—a mourner, and alone?”

“Alone? Impossible! woman, with the power and wish to bless, can never be alone!”

“Your reproach is too bitter. I feel that to this end my own destiny is tending.”

“Never!”

“Yes, *you* will leave me!”

“You wrong my heart when you suppose it possible that I should forget so dear—so true a friend.”

“I did not say you would *forget*—to forsake is not always to forget. But did you not observe how soon my little court was dispersed by the evil genius always presiding at Nugent Park? one, most dutifully hastening to visit a sick parent, whom it was well known he had never loved; another, for the first time in his life, going to transact business in town; a third, to travel—no farther than Hyde Park—and so on. Yet, of all these, each separate individual had professed more regard for me than you have, though the first shade of sadness on my brow dissolved the spell which had bound them to me.

“No, no; I know what society is, and how

its component parts are held together. I know at what price we purchase the privilege of being admired—of being what is called *beloved*. I know that when beauty fades, and conversation becomes less brilliant, the circle of friendship will contract; and love, the vainest fantasy of all, will perish for want of the food on which it subsists.”

“When Lady Nugent pronounces this sweeping censure upon love and friendship, who shall speak their eulogy? Yet, I cannot but believe that such things are. My brother is at this time ill and helpless, and incapable of all those arts which fascinate the young, and, according to your theory, hold society together. If there be no such thing as real friendship, what is it that keeps two lovely women by his restless couch, listening to his complaints without weariness, and soothing his anguish without reward, beyond the secret satisfaction of their own generous hearts?”

“It may be so,” said Lady Nugent,

gloomily, and still recurring to her own experience. “It may be so with some happier beings. I speak not so generally of others, as prophetically of myself. You, for example, are near me to-day—to-morrow you may be where some brighter fancy leads you. But tell me, for I will not trouble you for ever with my sad thoughts, tell me where you have been this morning?”

“Conversing with the most interesting woman in the world—your ladyship, of course, excepted.”

“Ah! I know well the value of those exceptions which occur of course. But who is this *rara avis*—this queen of beauty—this rose of the wilderness?”

“Her name is simple as her pretensions. It will afford you no clue to her character, when I call her Mary Grey. Nor will I pretend that her own merits, or even her own charms, would have had the power to fascinate me, had she not been early and inti-

mately acquainted with my own family. You will be surprised to hear that I have seen my brother."

Lady Nugent started. "And made yourself known to him?"

"No, not yet."

"But you intend it?"

"I am undecided. I would ask your advice as a friend, had I any right to trouble you with my domestic affairs."

"Ask me nothing. I have no advice to give. I see but one thing clearly; it is, that you will leave me."

"Impossible! I owe you too much."

"Yes, Elliott Lee. I know that you will leave me; and I know it not the less, because you talk of what you owe me. Gratitude is the last, and the strongest bond which holds a noble mind. Because it is the last, there comes one period, before all are severed, when it exists alone; and because it exists

alone, we magnify its strength, and persuade ourselves it will endure for ever."

"I can only repeat, you do not know me, or you would not do this injustice to my heart. But, suppose I should return to my own family, as I sometimes dream I shall. How would this separate me from you?"

"How? I will answer you in the words of our noble poet, because

'The aim of their existence is not mine.'"

"Is it absolutely impossible that your purposes should unite, and that the same high ambition should be theirs and yours?"

"What! That I should become the Lady Bountiful of the parish of Branden! that I should devote my mornings to the village school, to stroking the heads of the little boys and girls who strive to please me; and then, after hastening home to an early dinner, should spend the evening in the heated con-

venticle where a hair-brained enthusiast, fresh from the counter, or the loom, expounds the gospel to his enraptured audience!”

“No,” replied Elliott, more dissatisfied with the mind in which this picture was conceived, than disgusted with the picture itself—“I do not ask if this be possible; but there is a purpose acknowledged by your heart as well as mine—a purpose for which all human powers, whether of feeling or understanding, are given; and I would put it to your conscience, as well as to my own, how far this purpose has been fulfilled by us.”

“You must first tell me what this all-important purpose is.”

“To increase the sum of human happiness—of rational, lasting, moral happiness. To the enjoyment of the present hour, few have contributed so bountifully as Lady Nugent. But, by your own confession, this prodigality of the means of pleasure brings with it no proportionate reward. Is there not then a higher,

a more intense and durable enjoyment, which we have neglected to cultivate, both in ourselves and others?"

" 'Is Saul also among the prophets?'" said Lady Nugent, smiling; for this close and scrutinizing appeal to her conscience pained her, and she sought to ward it off with her wonted blandishments of manner.

But Elliott, who, during the last few days had thought more seriously than at any period of his former life, endured the raillery of his friend unmoved, though not without deriving from it an additional impulse to seek the society of those to whom life was less burthensome, and age less fearful.

CHAPTER X.

WHEN Mary Grey repeated to her sister all that had passed between herself and her morning visitor, strange symptoms of intelligence passed over the countenance of Harriet; and without entering into the romance of Mary's story, she asked in plain terms if the gentleman was tall or short, dark or light, dressed in blue, black, or brown; with a long catalogue of common-place inquiries, tending very much to reduce Mary's hero into a mere ordinary man of bones and sinews, adorned with the vulgar habiliments of a most unclassical age and country.

“What can you mean?” said Mary. “Are

you tracing out an impostor or a spy, that you are so circumstantial in your inquiries?"

"I mean," replied Harriet, with a look of increasing satisfaction, "that this strange gentleman of yours is no other than Elliott Lee!"

"Impossible! what leads you to this conclusion?"

"It is of little use asking what leads, or what misleads me. I know I am right. The dark hair, the figure—every thing corresponds."

"Except the character," observed Mary, who, after having herself once entertained the same suspicion, had finally dismissed it altogether from her mind; deeming it morally impossible, that a man whose best feelings were perverted, as she believed was the case with the brother of her friend, could have acted as the individual in question had done towards her sister and herself.

"Impossible!" she said again, as the idea

gained imperceptibly upon her; until at last it became a conviction, almost as decided as in the mind of her sister. But still she ever and anon exclaimed, "Impossible!" as the incongruous elements of Elliott's character resolved themselves into two distinct personalities, again to be united by Harriet's pertinacity, assisted by the internal evidence of her own heart. For Harriet knew nothing of the anonymous letter, of the interview between Mary and the stranger at the inn, or of the manner in which he had risked his life for a poor helpless girl; and therefore there seemed nothing improbable to her, in Mary's having in reality received Elliott as her visitor that morning.

Nor was it long before Harriet enjoyed a complete triumph in her own superior penetration. The next time Elliott called at Welbourne House, it was in his own proper person; and much as Mary strove to meet him with a look and manner the most cheerful

and cordial that ever welcomed a wanderer home, there awoke within her soul such new sensations, such memories of long-forgotten things, that she could not altogether command her voice; and sometimes when she tried to smile, her eyes were filled with tears.

Nor could Elliott clearly understand her embarrassment, for he knew not how deeply she had felt for those of whom he had been regardless; nor indeed, how much the friends of his youth had suffered from his neglect. Forgetful himself, he had deemed himself forgotten; and with this conviction he had been too readily consoled.

“Do you think,” said he to Mary, “that my brother will be able to see me in the course of a few days?”

“If,” said Mary, “he continues to gain strength, as he has done since Sunday, I hope he may.” And as she spoke, an expression of such soul-felt gladness sparkled through her tears, that Elliott felt sufficiently rewarded for

the effort he had made, even if its influence should extend no farther.

Leaving the friends so early known, and so long separated, to cultivate a more lasting intimacy, we return to Lady Nugent, who, the reader may already have perceived, was characterised by that strange anomaly—a combination of the most brilliant talents and the worst feminine weakness.

In her last morning's ride with Elliott Lee, she had set off, listless, weary, and dispirited; but she had returned with more animation in her countenance, and more capacity to think and feel; for her vanity had been piqued, her affections wounded, and her envy roused, by the conversation of him whom she regarded as her sole remaining friend.

“ Let him go!” said she, indignantly, when she had gained the privacy of her own chamber. “ Let him offer his vows at this pure and holy shrine. He is less to me, than I have been to him. His place at my side, another may sup-

ply ; but where will he find a second Lady Nugent ?”

And then she thought proudly of the golden record of her fame,—of the laurels her genius had won,—how her name, pronounced by the lips of the mighty, was echoed by the multitude,—and how after ages would hear it, but to wonder and admire.

And what to her woman’s heart was all this? Like the gilding of the prison bars to the wretched victim within—like the silken cord around the neck of the expiring criminal—like the gorgeous canopy above the royal death bed!

No! never since the world began, was woman satisfied with this tribute to her genius or her power. Eager and reckless as she sometimes is in her pursuit of fame, how often does she pause to mourn in secret over its hollowness; for her only natural aliment is that which ministers to the support of her affections.

And it was with an unconquerable yearning

after this support, which women of all descriptions, under every circumstance, must need, that Lady Nugent had attached herself more than she was aware of, to Elliott Lee. Tired of the world, sick of its flatteries, and disgusted with its hollow friendships, she had learned to repose with perfect confidence upon his candour, his delicacy, his affection for herself; and the happier beings who have found these qualities in many, may imagine their value when found in only one.

“ I will see this angel of his, this village beauty,” said Lady Nugent, with that strange determination which prompts every jealous woman to rush into the presence of her rival, at every risk of suffering by the comparison of different charms.

Not that Lady Nugent was really jealous of Mary Grey, in her own person; but she was jealous of her virtues, of her connexion with Elliott’s family, and of the strong claims she thus possessed upon his interest and regard;

and she did, therefore, with the slightest plea imaginable, invent an excuse for calling at Welbourne House, where she found the object of her curiosity alone.

Mary had none of that rustic bashfulness which trembles at the approach of a splendid equipage ; she was, therefore, notwithstanding a slight feeling of astonishment, perfectly calm and self-possessed on receiving a visit from Lady Nugent, concluding that some business connected with the affairs of the neighbourhood, had given rise to this unprecedented circumstance.

She was, however, surprised to find the merest trifle in the world brought forward in excuse for this visit ; and that, instead of the poor of the parish of Branden, forming, as she had expected, the subject of their conversation, the name of Elliott Lee was recurred to more frequently than any other.

“ I hear his brother is dangerously ill,” said Lady Nugent.

“He has been,” replied Mary; “but we now hope he is rapidly recovering.”

“Does he know of his brother being in the neighbourhood?”

“He does. We were afraid, at first, that the interview would have been too much for him; but Elliott made himself known with so much delicacy, that I believe neither party have any thing to regret.”

Lady Nugent frowned; but she had not yet heard enough. “In addition to the motive I have stated,” said she, “I was prompted in making this call, by a wish to know whether I could in any way be serviceable to the young man in whom you are so kindly interested. Perhaps he will soon be able to try the benefit of the open air. My carriage and horses shall then be at his command.”

“We are all much indebted to your ladyship,” said Mary, “for this unlooked-for kindness, of which we should be truly glad to avail ourselves, had not Elliott previously made the offer of his carriage to his brother.”

Lady Nugent's brow lowered more darkly. "*Elliott* again," said she to herself, repeating Mary's familiar expression, and not aware of the long intimacy existing between her and Catherine Lee. "Their acquaintance must have progressed rapidly indeed." But, practising an art in which she was a great adept, that of concealing her surprise and chagrin under an appearance of indifference and light-heartedness, she immediately changed the subject; and, struck with the beauty of a small vase of flowers upon the mantel-piece, she rose to examine them, commenting with great fluency upon the ingenuity and skill with which they had been made; not, as is too frequently the case, to rival, but to resemble nature.

"Ah! this," said she, "is what I so often expatiate upon to my friends. Here is true grace, the feathery lightness, the fragility of flowers, growing where the sportive gales of summer have reached, and slightly ruffled them—not the stiff, marble petals which it is

evident no wind could ever raise. Is it to your taste, Miss Grey, that they owe their superior beauty?"

"They were made by my sister and myself," replied Mary; and she singled out from the rest, one considered to be Harriet's masterpiece, and which she always exhibited in preference to her own.

Beyond the flowers was one of those devices of the enemy of human love and concord—a capacious mirror, in which, the different members of the social circle cannot meet around the blazing hearth, without seeing themselves reflected distinctly true in every feature; nay, in the very laugh, and in those various contortions of countenance, of which, but for these merciless reflectors, we should never know ourselves to be guilty. Here the vain-glorious beauty, before but half assured of her superior charms, beholds and glories in the comparison with her less favoured sisters. Here the neglected child looks ruefully upon her own

distorted features, shrinking behind the fairer forms to which the mirror is more kind ; and here, on the present occasion, Lady Nugent, with a withering chill, that might, had they been less superficial, have driven the roses from her cheek, beheld the real difference between youth and age—as Mary stood with the flower in her hand, and her smooth, fair cheek turned unconsciously towards the glass.

Lady Nugent did not think her beautiful—*—she would not think so ;* but, to the charm of youth, she could not deny the tribute of her admiration ; and when she saw the contrast presented by her own features and complexion, the conviction of the utter impossibility of ever regaining what she had lost, flashed through her soul with the severest anguish a vain woman is capable of feeling.

It is true she might yet please—with what study or at how much cost was known to herself alone ; but the wind might lift the raven locks of Mary Grey from a forehead whose

calm beauty was pure and fair as winter's snow. She might sing, for she was skilled in music as in verse ; but Mary's moving lips displayed the pearly teeth and playful dimples, which music so often celebrates, without being able to recall. She had admirers, who came and went with the ebb and flow of her own spirits, receding in proportion as she neared the verge of that abyss from which beauty never was redeemed ; but Mary had years of bright promise to bestow on those who loved, and were beloved by her.

Thus, as she felt the increasing depression of her spirits, and the consequent falling away of her powers of pleasing, Lady Nugent determined to rouse herself, and to place fresh reliance upon the charms of her conversation, her accomplishments, and her talents.

With this determination, she formed a plan for an entertainment to be celebrated at Nugent Park, on the eve of her departure for London ; persuading herself, that while

under the fascination which she knew so well how to weave around her, Elliott Lee would be easily won to join her and her friends on their return to town.

Of his taste she knew enough to be aware, that, like herself, he would prefer the picturesque to the splendid, especially where splendour, as at Nugent Park, must be deficient in all its necessary concomitants. And, as every thing was propitious, both in the season of the year, and the surrounding scenery, she directed her numerous agents in the work of embellishment to the park and the pleasure grounds, rather than to the interior of the mansion.

Terminating the gentle declivity of a lawn, which lay before the windows in the unruffled beauty of its everlasting green, the river we have before described expanded itself into a mimic lake; and here were preparations for a boat race, upon which depended the chief amusement of the evening; while every grotto and alcove, whether buried in the silence of

the deep woods whose solemn shade extended to the banks of the river, or situated amongst labyrinthine and flower garnished walks, were to be supplied with music, and refreshment both for sense and soul.

Nor was the hospitality of Lady Nugent confined to any particular class of visitors. The park gates were to be thrown open to the public. Even the poor were invited to partake in the festivities of the evening ; and to contemplate the lady of the mansion, for a few short hours at least, in the character of a munificent benefactress.

Lady Nugent, in fact, knew nothing of poverty, but what relates to its picturesque effect. She could paint the exterior of a cottage, with a poor woman in the foreground ; and she had even wept over some of Gainsborough's orphan children. She had once composed an affecting ballad, too, called the Poor Widow, which occasioned in the mind of her lord some serious apprehensions, whether it

was not to stand in juxtaposition with the *rich* widow. But of the real situation and character of the working people, she knew nothing, beyond their uncouth looks and dresses ; and often did she regret the impossibility of introducing into the fertile valleys of England the poetical costume of other lands.

Gladly would she have indulged her friends on the coming occasion with the sight of groups of peasants dancing to the national music of their country ; and rosy girls, with wreaths of flowers around their brows, gliding like nymphs from tree to tree, or sporting like attendant graces in her train. She knew, however, just enough of the sturdy sons of Britain, not to be guilty of such practical absurdity, as to subject them to any poetical or fanciful association ; and, on consulting with her steward, it was agreed, that the taste of John Bull should be gratified by an unrestrained participation in the comforts of beef and brown ale, accompanied with the supreme gra-

tification of doing just what was most agreeable.

Nor did Lady Nugent find her invitations to her own circle of friends so much slighted, as their late escape from her society might have led her to expect. There wanted nothing but the promise of amusement, to draw them once more within the sphere of her influence ; and she was soon surrounded by her court, perhaps more easily attracted, because it was generally understood, that the queen of the ceremonies, was on the eve of her departure from the country.

While the great business of preparing for enjoyment was occupying every hand and heart in the establishment at Nugent Park ; enjoyment itself, without labour and without cost, was the portion of the inmates of Welbourne House.

Herbert Lee, now happily restored to the hope of continued life, was most satisfactorily situated under the care of the two sisters ;

whose increasing intimacy with Elliott, made the party seem more like one united family, than like those whom harsh feelings, or estranged affections had ever kept asunder.

Often was Lady Nugent the subject of their conversation, and Mary proved, by her enthusiastic praises of her manners, and her powers of pleasing, how entirely free was her noble heart from all taint of envy. Nay, she could even afford that rarest of all tributes, offered by women to their own sex—she could praise her beauty; while Harriet would sometimes throw out a less flattering insinuation, that all facts belonging so exclusively to past time, must be attended with some uncertainty.

What were Elliott's feeling or intentions with regard to the future, neither his brother, nor his friends were able to surmise. He evidently found pleasure in their society; but as the enjoyment of the present moment had hitherto been his sole pursuit, there was little to calculate upon from his continuing his daily

visits at Welbourne House, or even from these visits being lengthened every time.

“ I must tell you,” said Mary, during one of his morning calls, “ what an unexpected honour has been conferred upon us ;” and she handed to him a note from Lady Nugent. It was a polite, or rather a friendly invitation to the party at Welbourne House, to join her evening’s entertainment, and Mary appealed with great simplicity to Elliott, to know in what terms she ought to reply.

“ You will accept the invitation of course,” said he.

“ Not for any consideration,” replied Mary.

“ Why not ?”

“ There are a thousand reasons why we should not, though scarcely one that would be worth stating.”

“ One of Lady Nugent’s select parties, would be a very different affair. But this, you know, is quite a public occasion. There could be no difficulty in the world ; and I am sure, there

is much that would delight you and your sister in the park and grounds

“ I do not doubt it. I have long wished to see Nugent Park ; but to go by express invitation, is what I object to so much.”

“ I will tell you what to do. If the evening be fine, you can drive through the park with Herbert. His state of health will be a sufficient reason why you should not be considered as guests ; and if you will write a very pretty note to that effect, I will make all the rest easy to you.”

Mary still hesitated, but her scruples were in some measure overcome, by Elliott assuring her that his servants, who, with his carriage and horses were now at his brother's command, would know where to drive, and that the park gates would on that day be thrown open to the public.

“ To you,” he added, “ the grounds will be open too, so that among the number of guests you can wander where you please, without

attracting notice. There is one temple I should much like to show you, but, I suppose, even on this evening it will be kept sacred to a chosen few."

Although it is probable that Mary Grey would never have consented to being present at the festivities at Nugent Park—that pride or delicacy would have intervened to prevent her coming forward on a public occasion, in that dubious capacity so repulsive to a sensitive mind, which places an individual half way between the aristocracy and the vulgar; yet as Elliott evidently wished it, and as her great object was to establish as firmly as possible the connexion so happily commenced, between him and his early friends, she finally yielded a reluctant consent, in which Herbert and her sister joined more cordially. For the beauty of the surrounding scenery, the laying out and embellishment of the grounds, and the classical effect derived from the genius of Lady Nugent, rendered her country residence

externally, at least, a scene of the highest interest and gratification to all observers of taste.

In order to accomplish her purpose of recommending to Elliott's regard, the habits and associations of his early years, Mary prudently reflected that something should be done, by way of meeting his peculiar bent of mind.

He had hitherto looked upon the religious part of the community as being wholly opposed to the refined. It was necessary, therefore, to convince him that those who devote themselves to the highest and most important duties, are not necessarily excluded from the region of taste, but that they can sometimes pause in the midst of their useful avocations, to enjoy with intense admiration, both the beauties of nature, and the embellishments of art.

And it was with such feelings that she at last yielded to Elliott's persuasion, satisfied

that by merely accompanying Herbert and her sister through the park, on the evening of the regatta, she would not be called upon to take any other part in the amusements of the scene.

On such occasions as that which now called together Lady Nugent's friends and dependents, her native character shone forth in all its brilliance. Although incapable of insipidity, she was apt in private, and when unoccupied, to become languid and depressed ; but in all situations, where talent, taste, or beauty could be effectively displayed, she seemed to breathe her native atmosphere, and luxuriate in her proper element.

On the evening of the regatta, while the motionless air and the clear blue sky suffered every leaf, and flower, and graceful sail, and floating streamer, to display itself with the most picturesque effect, a number of boats lay silently upon the smiling lake, as various in

their equipments, as in the eager hopes with which their course was soon to be impelled.

The signal for the strife of oars was to be the gliding forth of one majestic bark, upon whose deck a canopy of purple velvet cast a deep shadow, that flitted with the motion of the vessel, not over the graceful form of the Egyptian Queen, but over one, who, had a diadem adorned her brow, might have vied with the enchantress of the Nile, in the proud privilege of conquering, and commanding hearts.

The glow of an evening sun fell over the surface of the water in one broad stream of liquid gold, tinging the summer foliage of the woods, the verdant slopes, the flowery gardens, the motley groups of expectant gazers, the long line of gaily-painted boats, and the white oars that glanced and sparkled in the crystal wave.

At length the splendid yacht, bearing the

precious burden of Lady Nugent and her friends, glided majestically from the leafy cove where it had been moored. A band of music awoke the echoes of the surrounding hills, and the rowers, each party dressed in an elegant costume, dashed forward in their impatient course.

It was an hour of proud triumph to the mistress of these festivities ; for she saw none but smiling faces around her, and she felt herself to be the moving spring of the complicated fabric, by which she had provided for the happiness of hundreds of human beings, upon whose lips her name would be mingled with gratitude and praise. Had she known how little each heart regarded the fountain of its pleasures, so long as it was but refreshed by the stream, her satisfaction would have been less complete.

Exulting in her own success, and perfect mistress of the art of conversing lightly on passing themes, or profoundly on the abstract

principles of things, connecting one topic with another, by easy and ingenious transitions, so as neither to disgust the grave with the gay, nor to weary the gay with the grave, she now regulated the tone of her conversation by the feelings and temper of those around her ; and yielding to the enthusiasm which time had not yet extinguished, became what she seemed formed to be—the most interesting and fascinating of women.

Elliott felt this. He was by her side, as she believed, a captive to her charms ; for whenever his eye met hers, his countenance wore an expression of earnest thought, in which she read the language of a devoted heart.

With what determined infatuation can women read what they wish, and see what they believe !

Elliott Lee was reflecting upon the weight which might have been thrown into the scale of virtue, by the right exercise of such talents as Lady Nugent possessed ; upon the holy in-

fluence she might thus have established over the minds of others ; and upon the tremendous responsibility of having allured, and charmed, and stimulated the hearts of thousands in vain.

He was roused from these contemplations by seeing his own carriage moving slowly in the distance, and a sudden transition of thought ensued, by no means favourable to the influence of the presiding genius.

He had directed his servants to drive to a particular part of the road, where he intended to meet the party ; and when the successful rowers had made the woods echo with their triumphant shouts, and the queen of the festival, after distributing the prizes with inimitable grace, had stepped from her light bark upon the mossy turf, and, accompanied by her troop of friends, was wending her way towards her favourite flower garden ; Elliott took advantage of this movement, to repair to his brother and the two sisters, whose society

was becoming every day more congenial to his feelings.

No persuasion of his, however, could induce them to approach the mansion, or even the adjoining grounds. All he could obtain, was their consent to alight from the carriage and accompany him to a kind of miniature pantheon, situated in a distant grove, whose solemn shade contrasted beautifully with the gorgeous sunset, now deepening into more resplendent hues.

There is one art, too much neglected, which those whose object is *to charm* would do well to cultivate—it is the art of *being charmed*. For it rescues many an hour from listlessness and discontent, by freshening all the springs of life and action, awakening in old age the energy of youth, and persuading the weary and desponding that they have still the power to please, and that even for them the world has happiness in store.

In this art, if we may call it so, Mary Grey

was peculiarly skilled. Not in the affectation of delight, that monstrous absurdity so prevalent in certain classes of society; but in the genuine rapture of an unsophisticated soul, carried out of itself by the pure enjoyment it derives from objects with which self in its littleness and personality holds no connexion.

Elliott Lee was not prepared for the eloquence of impassioned feeling, which burst from Mary's lips when she felt the magnificence of nature, or gazed with astonishment upon the noblest works of art. Of the latter, however, she knew so little, had seen so few of the best specimens, and was so entirely ignorant of the technicalities in which the *professed* admirers of painting and sculpture are so luminously and voluminously conversant, that her expressions were rather those of a fresh and vigorous mind perceiving for the first time the real grace, and dignity, and beauty of created things, than the phraseology of the critical observer, whose pride is to possess the

faculty of discovering every fault. Even if Mary had been silent, her eloquent eyes would have revealed more deep feeling, than the acclamations of a multitude ; and as Elliott, leading his delighted and attentive companion from one group of figures to another, expatiated upon their classical origin and history, he was infinitely more happy, than when he had himself been a learner in the same school of admiration. He was happier, for men delight to teach, when the pupil is young and beautiful and apt to learn, especially when the lesson is one which they consider calculated to display their highest mental powers ; and never was a mind more capable than Mary's of *reflecting* the light of superior genius and talent.

Still, from the height of enthusiasm she could descend in a moment, at the call of duty, to the most trivial and ordinary considerations ; and as the shadows lengthened on the ground, and the air grew chill with the evening dews, she remembered that Herbert Lee was an in-

valid, and that the temple of the gods, how congenial soever it might be to his poetical taste, was not a situation suited to his debilitated frame.

We will not, however, give Mary the whole credit of this prudent consideration. Harriet had thought of the danger at the same time—perhaps before; and now, as the party were returning to the carriage, she communicated to Elliott, what her sister's courage, for some unaccountable reason, seemed unequal to, that as he had been kind enough to offer Herbert the use of his carriage, whenever he thought himself equal to the journey, they had determined upon making the attempt on the following morning.

With what intense anxiety did Mary await the effect of this communication! Her heart beat so violently, that she was unable to utter one word of the many she had mentally arranged, for the purpose of throwing in some inducement for Elliott to accompany his bro-

ther. And all the while that she stood trembling for his reply, he looked away, so distant, and absorbed, that from his countenance there was little left to hope.

“My mother is increasingly ill,” said Herbert, “or I should not have ventured quite so soon; for I am still so weak as to need the help of my kind nurses, whom I can repay with nothing but weariness and complaint.”

“Wait for me a few moments,” said Elliott; “or stay—you can drive slowly round the Park to the north entrance, where I will meet you in half an hour.”

And with these words he disappeared amongst the trees, leaving the wondering party to calculate upon his intentions, with a vague mixture of anxiety and hope.

As the evening advanced, and Lady Nugent grew weary with her own exertions to be agreeable, as well as disappointed at missing from the surrounding circle the incense of that flattery which she had learned to value most,

because it was the most sincere; she had retired to the sylvan temple we have before described as her favourite resort, and which on the present occasion displayed a concentration of all the means and attributes of the most refined and intellectual enjoyment.

Here she had thrown herself listlessly, but gracefully, upon a couch; when, seeing her harp, she roused herself once more, and playfully touching the familiar chords, beguiled her feelings of that encroaching heaviness, which the indiscriminate applause of her admiring friends was not able to dissipate.

While she sung, or rather warbled a few low notes—while her eyes wandered through a flowery vista over the green lawn, the water, and the distant woods, without any definite perception of their beauty, a shadow fell upon the steps of the temple, and the next moment Elliott Lee stood before her, almost breathless with the haste he had made to say—*farewell.*

“ You seem hurried,” said Lady Nugent, and for an instant, the reanimation of her countenance returned.

“ I have come,” said he, “ to bid you good night. I am actually going with my brother to-morrow.”

“ So soon ?” asked Lady Nugent.

The words were for the many. The deep tone in which they were uttered, and the accompanying look were for himself alone.

“ Yes ; we set off early in the morning.”

“ And you leave me entirely,” she added, lowering her voice, and retreating towards one of the windows, where their conversation could not be heard.

“ I leave you for the present,” said he, “ but we shall meet again.”

“ Never !”

“ Why, my dear Lady Nugent, this want of confidence in one who would not for the world deceive you !”

“ I know what I say. I feel in the centre

of my heart, that you will learn to despise me, and that we shall never meet again !”

“ Impossible ! You wrong me deeply.”

“ No. It is you who deceive yourself. You are aware of my belief in a peculiar destiny, and that the character of this destiny is fixed by one particular act of our lives. The decision you have made this evening, has sealed our eternal separation—we shall meet no more !”

Elliott smiled. “ I have so little confidence,” said he, “ in your presentiments, that I can bid you adieu, with a light heart. My friends are waiting for me—I must be gone.”

“ Those who will share the whole of your life, may afford one moment more to me.”

Lady Nugent felt as if she had a world to say in that one moment, but her thoughts *would not* assume the form of words ; and while a dense cloud, like the shadow of the grave overspread her eyes, instead of the refreshing tears which belong to a younger and a lighter grief, she extended her hand ; and

Elliott, who from the partial twilight of the hour, had not perceived the expression of her countenance, said aloud—"My only satisfaction in leaving your ladyship is, that I leave you the centre of felicity, surrounded by so many friends, that the loss of one will not be felt. Good night, once more."

"Good night," said Lady Nugent, stung into momentary excitement by a thousand agonizing sensations, as inconceivable to others, as they were intense to her own bosom.

Before the shadow of Elliott Lee had passed away from the marble steps of the temple, the harp of Lady Nugent, rung with a loud triumphant air, and a voice of the clearest melody arose beneath that fretted dome.

He paused one moment, for the wildness of the lay had startled him. But soon convinced that he was leaving no real grief behind, he once more hurried on his way.

The moon had now risen, making the twilight more silvery pale, and as he gazed around

upon the enchanting scenery, the same music, borne along with the wandering zephyrs, reached his ear. It was more low and tremulous. In another moment the sound had ceased, and never from that hour did he retrace those flowery paths, or hear that voice again.

It is unnecessary to describe the moral process by which Elliott Lee was convinced, that a religious life is not incompatible with happiness; that practical utility is not necessarily opposed to refinement; and that an intellectual being can have no higher aim, than the establishment of moral good.

With the affectionate embrace of his long-neglected, and long suffering-parent, his earliest impressions, in which the practice of every virtue was indissolubly associated with the highest enjoyment, returned upon his soul in their full force; and having failed in the pursuit which had occupied so considerable a por-

tion of his past life, he became satisfied to find the happiness he had sought at *home*.

Not, certainly, in the home his mother occupied, or, strictly speaking, beneath her maternal influence; but within a short distance of his native place, he established himself in a noble mansion, which, from being a favourite resort of genius and talent, soon became a distinguished theatre for the exercise of the liberal arts. Nor was he many years in prevailing upon Mary Grey to add her means of happiness to his, and to share with him the pleasures of a rational and useful life.

It was long before his brother Herbert was restored to a vigorous state of health—so long, that the rector of Branden had had time to vacate his situation in the church, for one of humbler appointment in the church-yard; leaving his place to be filled more worthily by his former curate; who, in conjunction with the fair proprietor of Welbourne House, became a blessing to the poor of the surround-

ing neighbourhood, an example to the wealthy, and a comfort to the 'sore distressed.'

It was most unaccountable to Harriet, that notwithstanding all her past errors, her subsequent humiliation, and the full disclosure she made of her former life, she never could convince the worthy minister how undeserving she really was of his regard. It was, therefore, only natural that her unavailing arguments in time should cease, and that she should become satisfied to imitate his virtues, for which a more intimate acquaintance only tended to excite in her mind a deeper reverence and admiration.

We have already sent Terence Malone and his lovely wife away upon a journey; but we have not yet told the fair reader, what we hope she will remember for the benefit of her own husband, that the idea of this journey originated in the lady's mind at the very time when every improvement in her residence, which taste or fancy could suggest, was drawing near

its final completion, and that, when nothing was left for her to complain of at home, she persisted in her determination of going abroad.

Terence was not sorry that her inclination had taken this turn; for he was himself of a wandering and unsettled disposition; and in hurrying from one scene of interest to another, his wife had scarcely time to perceive all the disadvantages of her situation. They returned, however, by mutual agreement (or disagreement, we are not exactly certain which) in time to celebrate the christening of a son and heir. And many sons and daughters, neither so thoughtless as their father, nor so lovely as their mother, grew up within the Abbey walls, as happy and as light-hearted as unlimited indulgence could make them.

Let not the feelings of the gentle reader yearn over the situation of Catherine Lee, as if her virtues were neglected. It will be a satisfaction to those who consider marriage as the proper and equivalent reward of the high-

est merit, to know that she exchanged her maiden name for one of dignity and importance in the annals of her country, and that, through the whole of her exemplary life, she remained faithful to the friends of her youth, and to the principles so carefully instilled by her venerated mother.

Since it appears to be absolutely necessary that every character introduced into a fictitious story should be accounted for at the end, we cannot better conclude, than as we began—with Stephen Grey, who never recovered his mental or bodily health, from the time when his fortunes received so severe a shock.

All that could be done by filial affection to soothe his wounded feelings, was faithfully and studiously performed; but as he had never found pleasure in personal indulgence, or in the familiar intercourse of social life, it was impossible to reach his heart with any outward means of consolation.

That he experienced a deeper consolation,

beyond the power of human kindness to impart, was confidently believed, from the mild, subdued, and reverential manner in which he devoted himself to the most austere religious duties, enduring with perfect patience and resignation, the lingering out of a painful and burdensome existence, from which he derived no enjoyment but that of anticipating the final call, that should bid him depart and be at rest.

THE END.









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